

After Mountains and Sea: Frankenthaler 1956–1959



After *Mountains and Sea*: Frankenthaler 1956–1959

*With a conversation between Helen Frankenthaler and
Julia Brown as well as essays by Brown and Susan Cross*

In 1952, at the age of twenty-three, Helen Frankenthaler created her legendary painting *Mountains and Sea*. Comprised of translucent washes of thinned-down pigment embedded in unprimed canvas, this large-scale painting was the first in which she used her soak-stain technique. Frankenthaler's mixture of oil and turpentine or kerosene, which she poured directly onto an unprimed canvas, seeped into and through the raw cotton fibers, evoking a sense of openness and atmospheric space without relying on traditional illusionism.

In creating *Mountains and Sea*, Frankenthaler drew upon diverse sources that ranged from the Analytic Cubism of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso to the abstractions of Arshile Gorky and, especially, Jackson Pollock, whose radical technique ultimately inspired Frankenthaler to reject the conventions of easel painting. Frankenthaler—who was introduced to many of the leading artists of the New York School's first generation by critic Clement Greenberg—became associated with the group of artists who became known as the second generation. In the 1950s, she established her unique method and experimental use of materials, which came to influence her contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of artists.

Published on the occasion of an exhibition organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, this book explores Frankenthaler's artistic maturation, from the groundbreaking achievement of *Mountains and Sea* to the extraordinary paintings created from 1956 through 1959. Beautifully illustrated with full-color reproductions of Frankenthaler's luminous works, this elegant volume offers a conversation between the artist and Julia Brown, Curator of Special Exhibitions, revealing Frankenthaler's artistic process and the influences that inspired her; an essay by Susan Cross, Curatorial Assistant, providing a broader historical perspective on Frankenthaler's contribution to a pivotal period in art history; and a poetic tribute by Brown to Frankenthaler's work.





After Mountains and Sea: Frankenthaler 1956–1959

Deutsche Guggenheim BERLIN

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

After Mountains and Sea:

Frankenthaler 1956–1959

Curated by Julia Brown

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cover:

Detail of *Mother Goose Melody*, 1959 (cat. no. 13).

frontispiece:

Helen Frankenthaler in front of *Mountains and Sea* at her

West End Avenue apartment, New York, spring 1956.

page 12:

Detail of *Acres*, 1959 (cat. no. 11).

page 28:

Detail of *New York Bamboo*, 1957 (cat. no. 5).

page 50:

Detail of *Mountains and Sea*, 1952 (cat. no. 1).

pages 54–55:

Detail of *Interior*, 1957 (fig. 16).

page 82:

Detail of *Jacob's Ladder*, 1957 (cat. no. 7).

Contents

13

The Emergence of a Painter

Susan Cross

29

A Conversation

Helen Frankenthaler with Julia Brown

51

In Pursuit of Beauty:

Notes on the Early Paintings of Helen Frankenthaler

Julia Brown

56

Plates

83

Chronology

92

Suggested Readings

Lenders to the Exhibition

Helen Frankenthaler

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The Museum of Modern Art,

New York

Sandra and Jacob Y. Turner

University of California,

Berkeley Art Museum

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,

Richmond

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Following our exhibition of Katharina Sieverding's photographic series, Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin is showing thirteen early paintings by Helen Frankenthaler, the most important representative of New York's second generation of Abstract Expressionists.

This is the first solo exhibition of Frankenthaler's work in a German museum. The last major exhibition of her paintings seen in Germany was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969 and traveled to the Orangerie Herrenhausen, Hanover, and the Kongresshalle, Berlin. In addition, this is the first substantial publication on the artist in German. These milestones demonstrate that, even in a time as culturally alert and globally networked as ours, it is still possible to present and publish bodies of work by a major artist that may be new to some audiences. Frankenthaler's first momentous appearance on the German art scene occurred at Documenta 2 in Kassel in 1959. As part of a much-discussed exhibition of twenty-seven American artists, Porter A. McCray had selected her paintings *Mountains and Sea* (1952, cat. no. 1), *Las Mayas* (1958, fig. 20), and *Nude* (1958, cat. no. 9). Two of these three works are now on view in Berlin, *Mountains and Sea* for the first time. (*Nude* was previously shown in a reconstruction of Documenta 2 at the Berlinische Galerie in 1988–89.)

Conceptually, the present exhibition ties in with our inaugural show, *Visions of Paris: Robert Delaunay's Series*, by taking advantage of the Deutsche Guggenheim gallery as a space ideally suited for the concentrated presentation of specific subjects or series by individual artists. While the Delaunay exhibition showcased the motifs of his series, our selection of Frankenthaler's works focuses on her seminal painting, *Mountains and Sea* and on the productive period from 1956 through 1959, during which she built upon and extended the accomplishment of that masterpiece.

Frankenthaler had just returned from a vacation in Nova Scotia when she painted *Mountains and Sea* in a "wash" of oil on untreated canvas in a single day, October 26, 1952. She was twenty-three years old at the time. Only seven years later the work was shown at Documenta.

Next to art-historical retrospectives, such closeness to — and openness for — the creative production of emerging artists constitutes a primary goal in the program of Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin. A commissioned work by the young Hamburg artist Andreas Slominski for our gallery on Unter den Linden will mark the beginning of this part of our program in 1999.

Together, these different projects embody Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin's commitment to reflect art's past from today's perspective and to help shape the art of the present. It is a commitment that will continue to define our future programs and presentations.

In 1985, the Guggenheim had the pleasure of presenting Helen Frankenthaler's works on paper made over three decades in a retrospective exhibition that brought to our audiences a greater understanding of the expressive and experimental nature of this part of the artist's work. We are very pleased to once again bring Frankenthaler's work to our visitors with a focused exhibition of the artist's paintings from the 1950s. As part of a series of exhibitions the Guggenheim has organized to highlight specific aspects of an artist's work, *After Mountains and Sea: Frankenthaler 1956–1959* examines a select group of paintings that articulates a powerful phase in the artist's career. Having established herself as a formidable painter with the magnificent and radical *Mountains and Sea*, made in 1952, Frankenthaler has long been recognized for the significant impact this legendary painting had on her contemporaries as well as succeeding generations. Using thinned-down paints on unprimed canvas, Frankenthaler was able to produce a watercolor-like effect in her remarkable, light-filled canvases. The works featured in the exhibition demonstrate the artist's enduring inventiveness and skill. Showing through the artist's diaphanous color washes and calligraphic gestures, the fibers of the bare canvas reinforce the almost shocking flatness of the picture surface, while the thin layers of seeping color create a magical sense of movement and space.

In the last years of the 1950s, Frankenthaler earned increasing recognition at home and abroad. In 1959, she presented several works at *Documenta II* in Kassel and *V Bienal de São Paulo*, and won first prize at the *Première Biennale de Paris* for *Jacob's Ladder* (1957, cat. no. 8). At a time when Abstract Expressionism was the subject of debate in art circles, Frankenthaler was making unique works of great character and emotion that continue to move and inspire us.

This project could not have been realized without the generosity and cooperation of individuals and institutions who have shared with us important works from their collections, and we would like to thank all the lenders whose support has made this exhibition possible. We understand the

difficulty in parting with these monumental and beloved works and feel very fortunate to have been able to bring together this intimate group of remarkable paintings for our visitors. We would like to thank Julia Brown, Curator of Special Exhibitions, for the planning and organization of this stunning exhibition. And, of course, we are deeply indebted to Helen Frankenthaler, without whose unflagging efforts and generous collaboration this exhibition and catalogue would not have come to fruition.

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Helen Frankenthaler, whose work enriches our lives, and whose patience, good humor, and creative engagement in all aspects of the planning and execution of this exhibition and its catalogue have been a source of inspiration to all of us who have had the good fortune to work with her. I am particularly grateful for her tireless and thoughtful work on the interview for the catalogue. The result of all her efforts has enhanced our understanding of her work and creative process. She has devoted an immense amount of time, attention, and energy to this project, which could not have been successfully realized without her cooperation and generous involvement.

I would also particularly like to thank Maureen St. Onge, Helen Frankenthaler's assistant of many years, for her dedicated commitment to and knowledge of the work of Frankenthaler and for her generous assistance on all aspects of this exhibition and its catalogue.

I offer my sincere thanks to the museum colleagues and private collectors who have made loans available to us for presentations of this exhibition. Their generosity is respectfully acknowledged and greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank Sigrid Freundorfer Fine Art, New York, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for their role in making works available to us. The support of Ann Freedman, President, Knoedler & Company, New York, is also highly valued.

The staff of the Guggenheim Museum has provided invaluable assistance in organizing this exhibition. Susan Cross has been an equal partner in this project in all matters curatorial and administrative. I am also appreciative of the insights she has brought to bear on the early phase of Frankenthaler's career through her essay in this catalogue. This exhibition and catalogue have also benefited from the research of many talented young curatorial interns, namely Bridget Alsdorf, Daniela Cascella, Kevin Chua, Haçer Bozkurt, and Mónica Ceño.

Director Thomas Krens's enthusiasm for this project and his support from its inception have been most appreciated. My gratitude also goes to Lisa Dennison, Deputy Director and

Chief Curator; Judith Cox, Deputy Director and General Counsel; and Rosemarie Garipoli, Deputy Director for External Affairs, for their support. I have also been fortunate to have benefited from the assistance and creative thinking of George McNeely, Director of Corporate and Foundation Giving, as well as Ruth Taylor, Director of Budgeting and Planning, and Wesley Jessup, Senior Financial Analyst, who have overseen the financial aspects of the exhibition. I am indebted to Suzanne Quigley, Head Registrar, Collections and Exhibitions, and especially Hubbard Toombs, Assistant Registrar, who made the complex arrangements for the transportation and insurance of these large-scale works coming from all over the country, and to Ellen Pratt, Project Conservator, as well as Julie Barten, Assistant Conservator, who have shown great care in ensuring the safety and condition of the works. Elizabeth Estabrook, Conservator, Amann Conservation Associates, was of particular assistance as well. I am also grateful for the expertise of Karen Meyerhoff, Director of Exhibition and Collection Management and Design; Scott Wixon, Manager of Art Services and Preparations; Barry Hylton, Exhibition Technician; Jocelyn Brayshaw, Acting Chief Preparator; Richard Gombar, Museum Technician; Jocelyn Groom, Exhibition Design Coordinator; Mary Ann Hoag, Lighting Designer; Dan Gillespie, Lighting Design Associate; Marcia Fardella, Designer; and Susan Lee, Assistant Designer, who have all contributed to the beautiful installation and presentation of the exhibition.

Additional staff members have provided invaluable support to the exhibition's presentation in Berlin. I would like to offer thanks to Anne Leith, Planning and Operations Coordinator; Paul Pincus, Project Director, Planning and Operations; Marion Kahan, Exhibition Program Manager; and Jessica Ludwig, Graphic and Exhibition Design Coordinator; as well as Jens Hoffman, Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin Curatorial Coordinator.

At Deutsche Bank, I would like to thank the Spokesman of the Board of Managing Directors, Dr. Rolf-E. Breuer, for his collaboration in bringing Frankenthaler's work to German

audiences. I am also grateful to Dr. Ariane Grigoteit and Friedhelm Hütte, Chief Curators of the Deutsche Bank Collection, as well as Svenja Simon, Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin Gallery Manager, for their contributions to the exhibition's presentation in Berlin and for their enthusiasm and graciousness. Sara Bernshausen, of the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, and Britta Färber, of the Deutsche Bank Arts Group, have also been of great assistance. The expertise of Elisabeth Bushart and Friederike Beseler, Conservators, has proved invaluable. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to Tilman Hoepfl and Uwe Rommel, exhibition technicians, for their work on the installation. For the German edition of the catalogue, I wish to thank Barbara Hess for her excellent translation and Jürgen Geiger for his skillful editing.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the superb Publications Department staff at the Guggenheim Museum, whose professionalism and skill is unmatched. It has been a privilege to work on this catalogue with Anthony Calnek, Director of Publications; Elizabeth Levy, Managing Editor/Manager of Foreign Editions; Laura Morris, former Senior Editor; Jennifer Knox White, Associate Editor; Carol Fitzgerald, Assistant Editor; Melissa Secondino, Production Assistant; and Keith Mayerson. In addition, I am grateful to David Heald, Chief Photographer and Director of Photographic Services, and Ellen Labenski, Assistant Photographer, for their work for the catalogue. My heartfelt thanks go to Cara Galowitz, who is responsible for the beautiful design of this book.

I wish to express my appreciation to many others who have made valuable contributions to the planning and implementation of this exhibition. Staff members at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, the André Emmerich Gallery, New York, and Knoedler & Company have been helpful with research. Judy Throm and Susan Cary at The Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., Jenny Greenberg, and Sarah Greenberg Morse have also provided assistance. Barbara Lyons and Michele Adams at Harry N. Abrams, Inc.; Avril Peck and the Photographic Permissions staff at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and José Antonio Lasheras,

Director and Curator at the Museo y Centro de Investigación de Altamira, Spain, have all been very patient with our numerous photographic inquiries. I am also grateful to John Elderfield, Chief Curator at Large, The Museum of Modern Art, for his collegial support and for his generous permission to use excerpts from the thorough chronology included in his 1989 monograph on the artist.

To all those who have contributed to the success of the exhibition, I offer my sincere thanks.



The artists known as the second generation of the New York School, with whom Helen Frankenthaler is associated, have been called by Irving Sandler “the inheritors . . . of a revolution.”¹ While the first generation led the battle in the 1940s for a new aesthetic distinct from the European tradition, their successors were charged with maintaining the radical direction set for American painting. By the 1950s, the new vanguard, whose better known members included Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still, had established New York as the art capital of the world, a title Paris could no longer claim. Because many artists of the European avant-garde had fled to New York in the 1940s, the lessons of the School of Paris were being taught firsthand in the United States, though subjected to the challenge of a new American painting style characterized by bravado, energy, and inward focus. The paintings of these pioneering American artists took on qualities appropriate to what was seen as a new frontier, including monumental scale, agitated brushstroke, and a sense of the heroic.

Reacting to the horrors of World War II, many postwar American artists struggled with the role and content of their art, and, with a sense of despondency, rejected the social objectives associated with European Modernism. Painting turned away from the natural world and ceased to reflect exterior concerns, becoming, instead, a place of retreat. Freed from its ideological role, painting was claimed as a purpose unto itself, and, as such, its process became for some artists the very subject of painting. For others, in part inspired by Surrealism, it was a vehicle for expressing the inner self. Primitive forms and automatic-writing techniques were adopted by artists seeking a liberation from imposed rationality and a means to tap into a collective unconscious. The varied styles and goals of the New York School provoked critical dialogues that also moved in decidedly different directions. Attracted by diverse aspects of the work being made at the time, the two most influential critics who championed this new generation of artists, Clement Greenberg

and Harold Rosenberg, focused on, respectively, what have now been termed formalism and gesturalism. While Greenberg promoted the purely plastic aspects of painting and, over time, the removal of anything from the medium that was extraneous to pictorial issues, Rosenberg saw painting as an existential event and an arena in which art and life were inextricably intertwined.²

With supporters such as Greenberg and Rosenberg, the New York School enjoyed a growing success in the early 1950s, as galleries and museums recognized the importance of its output. Younger artists flocked to the city to work with its newly anointed masters and were fortunate to be the heirs to their expanding legacy. A close-knit community was formed among the second-generation New York School artists, including Friedel Dzubas (with whom Frankenthaler briefly shared a studio in 1952), Robert Goodnough, Grace Hartigan, Harry Jackson, Alfred Leslie, Joan Mitchell, and Larry Rivers, to name only those closest to Frankenthaler. In the early years, there was a feeling of fraternity and collaboration as well as competition, and ideas and passions were exchanged. The circle included musicians, such as John Cage, dancers, writers, and poets, such as John Ashbery and Frank O’Hara, whose work grappled with similar issues. Panels and lectures on Wednesday and Friday evenings at the Club, a gathering place for artists, attracted members of both generations who would then head over to the Cedar Street Tavern to continue heated conversations about art.

The gesturalism associated with de Kooning (as well as Kline) found the most followers among second-generation artists as opposing camps began to center themselves around de Kooning and Pollock. “The younger painters were polarized one way or the other,” according to Frankenthaler.³ The two most prominent members of the New York School, both artists were heroes to the younger generation. Pollock was well known to the general public by 1950. In 1949, *Life* magazine speculated that he was perhaps the greatest living painter in America.⁴ De Kooning, however, was more accessible to the second generation, both geographically and stylistically. While Pollock had moved to East Hampton, on



1. Helen Frankenthaler, *Woman on a Horse*, 1949–50.
Oil on canvas, 127.6 x 101.6 cm (50 1/4 x 40 inches).
Private collection.



2. Pablo Picasso, *Femme assise (Seated Woman)*, 1927.
Oil on wood, 129.9 x 96.8 cm (51 1/4 x 38 3/4 inches).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of
James Thrall Soby.

Long Island, New York, de Kooning remained on Tenth Street, the center of the city's downtown artistic activity and the location of many galleries and artists' studios.⁵ In terms of painting style, Pollock's all-over method was more difficult to comprehend; de Kooning's paintings had a more visible structure and a traditional relationship to the frame. Toward the end of the 1950s, de Kooning's brushstroke had become so influential and was emulated by so many artists that it could be considered somewhat of a mannerism. Much of the work being made downtown was criticized by some as having what Greenberg later termed a too-familiar "Tenth Street Touch."⁶ In 1959, in reaction to disparaging assertions that the individuality and significance of Abstract Expressionism was waning, *Artnews* published a two-part article asking if the second generation had established "a new Academy."⁷

While Frankenthaler culled a great deal from de Kooning, she was unusual in her eventual leaning toward Pollock. "You could become a de Kooning disciple or satellite or mirror," she has said, "but you could *depart* from Pollock."⁸ It was not the drama of Pollock's drips and flung paint that attracted Frankenthaler but his rejection of the conventional brush and easel in order to disrupt conventional composition. In 1952, the same year Rosenberg published his influential article "The American Action Painters,"⁹ Frankenthaler painted her magnificent *Mountains and Sea* (cat. no. 1), a canvas that has no buildup of paint and shows little of the violent gesture that later came to define avant-garde painting of the 1950s. Frankenthaler's painting consists of misty planes of color absorbed right into the fibers of the canvas. Often described as lyrical, her paintings were not always well received by critics at the time, given the fashion for a more encrusted surface and aggressive technique.¹⁰ *Mountains and Sea*, however, was pivotal for Frankenthaler as well as for successive generations of artists. Morris Louis's and Kenneth Noland's inspirational encounters with the painting in 1953 have been noted repeatedly; their adoption of the soaked-in color of Frankenthaler's canvases to produce purely optical paintings containing no reference to the natural world or sign of the artist's hand was a purely formal approach that took

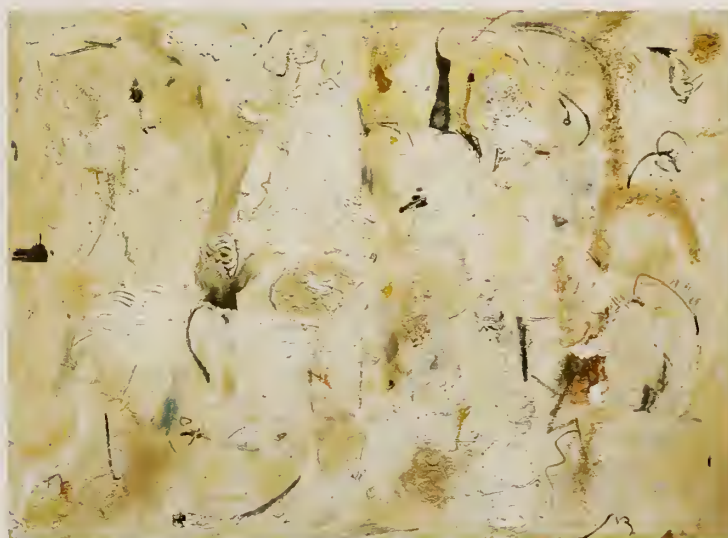
Greenberg's theories to their logical conclusion. Barbara Rose has remarked that it was the recognition of Louis's and Noland's work that provoked a change in judgment regarding the quality of Frankenthaler's paintings.¹¹ Her characteristic defiance and courage in working outside conventional taste spurred the unique development of her painting.

To understand how a painter could achieve such a breakthrough at the precocious age of twenty-three, it is crucial to examine the influences that shaped and prepared her.¹² Frankenthaler's first serious exposure to painting was as a teenager at the privileged Dalton School in New York, where she was taught the fundamentals of painting by the Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo, himself a superb colorist. In the mid-to-late 1940s, during her years at the progressive Bennington College in Vermont, the burgeoning young artist analyzed the masterpieces of the recent and distant past. While studying with the painter Paul Feeley, Frankenthaler learned the formal structures of good composition and "what it was that worked; or if it didn't, why?"¹³

It was Cubism, however, that Frankenthaler mainly focused on in those early years, making careful still-life and portrait studies employing its geometric, planar structures. Though Frankenthaler was developing at a time when the Abstract Expressionists were beginning to make their distinctive mark, Cubism remained a looming shadow that both inspired and constricted most Modern artists in pursuit of original forms. As the critic Gene Baro has pointed out, Picasso "was not yet exorcized," and many artists working in the 1940s and 1950s were "struggling to get out from under Cubism" and trying to create their own languages.¹⁴ A winter period spent working in New York with painter Wallace Harrison more firmly entrenched Frankenthaler in her engagement with Cubism.¹⁵ Eventually, the artist fought her own battle to extricate her work from the limitations of the tight Cubist grid and its reduced palette, yet she has retained throughout the varied stages of her continued investigations Cubism's ambiguous sense of space. Likewise, Frankenthaler has not abandoned her concern for maintaining spatial tension between foreground and background.



3. Helen Frankenthaler, *Provincetown Bay*, 1950.
Oil on canvas, 41.3 x 51.4 cm (16 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches).
Private collection.



4. Helen Frankenthaler, *Painted on 21st Street*, 1950-51. Oil, sand, plaster, and coffee grounds on canvas, 175.6 x 246.4 cm (69 1/2 x 97 inches). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Museum purchase 1980.



5. Helen Frankenthaler, *Untitled*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 143.2 x 214.6 cm (56 7/8 x 84 1/2 inches). Private collection.



6. Joan Miró, *Le Chasseur (Paysage catalan)* (*The Hunter [Catalan Landscape]*), 1923-24. Oil on canvas, 64.8 x 100.3 cm (25 1/2 x 39 1/2 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase.

After graduating from Bennington in 1949, Frankenthaler returned to New York City. There, she briefly studied art history with Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University, but by the end of one semester had returned to painting full-time. Though she was beginning to search for a new idiom, her early training remained evident. *Woman on a Horse* (fig. 1), begun in 1949, recalls many of Picasso's portraits of the Synthetic Cubist period, such as *Femme assise* (*Seated Woman*, 1927, fig. 2), a painting reproduced in a 1950 issue of *Artnews* as "the critic's favorite Picasso oil in America."¹⁶ Frankenthaler's work employs the same interlocking, overlaid planes, profile and multiple perspectives, and simultaneous attention to depth and flatness. She had learned a vocabulary that had become akin to a system of accepted values. Even at this early date, however, Frankenthaler's original use of color announced itself.

Asked to organize a benefit exhibition of Bennington alumnae work at the Seligmann Gallery in 1950, Frankenthaler represented her own art with *Woman on a Horse*. Greenberg attended the exhibition at the young artist's invitation and while touring the show discussed her painting as one he did not favor.¹⁷ Despite this beginning, the two formed a close association, and through Greenberg Frankenthaler was quickly immersed in New York's avant-garde art community. She began visiting influential galleries such as Egan, Sidney Janis, Kootz, and Betty Parsons, was introduced to the Cedar Street Tavern and the Club, and became friendly with artists such as Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Gottlieb, Kline, Lee Krasner, Pollock, Rothko, and David Smith.

While digesting the revolutionary developments she was witnessing in the contemporary art world, Frankenthaler continued to look at the work of older European artists such as Vasily Kandinsky, Henri Matisse, and Joan Miró, whose work she had studied in college. Unlike her immediate predecessors, Frankenthaler could look at the work of the Europeans confident that American art had established its own identity. Unlike many of her peers, who, as Rose posited, "were neither as defensive, nor as dependent on European

painting as former generations,”¹⁸ Frankenthaler claims that perhaps it was an understanding of the Europeans that helped her finally to grasp the freedom and originality of Pollock. Frankenthaler’s ties to Europe were made stronger through Hans Hofmann, a painter and teacher who in Paris had witnessed the early days of the Fauves and the Cubists. At Greenberg’s suggestion, Frankenthaler enrolled in Hofmann’s Provincetown, Massachusetts school for three weeks during the summer of 1950. Hofmann had synthesized the languages of early Modernism into his own “push-pull” theory, which employed contrasting fields of color to produce plastic depth on the flat surface of a painting. As a teacher, Hofmann wielded great influence over the many artists of the second generation whom he instructed.¹⁹ Hofmann’s use of vivid color arrangements may have opened up Frankenthaler’s confidence in her own daring palette, which emerged only in later works. Frankenthaler found, however, that his technique merely echoed the balancing of opposing planes she had already learned through Cubism and her intense study with Harrison. The immediately palpable effect of her experience in Provincetown was born from the landscape studies Frankenthaler made outside of class. These would propel her work in a new direction, one that would inform her sensibility throughout her career.

Suddenly, space opened up in her work, and a more painterly treatment surfaced. *Provincetown Bay* (1950, fig. 3), made that summer, demonstrates the beginnings of Frankenthaler’s leaning toward abstracted imagery as well as her continued interest in the flatness of the picture plane. From her studio on the second floor, Frankenthaler painted the bay seen from above and at a distance, combining both flat and perspectival views. Though vaguely familiar landmarks of the bay are visible in the depiction, the paint appears ready to slide right off the canvas. Despite her encounter with Hofmann, color still had not become an integral part of Frankenthaler’s work. The following winter back in New York, she was working with a more reduced, Cubist palette. *Painted on 21st Street* (1950–51, fig. 4; named for the location of her studio) illustrates Frankenthaler’s



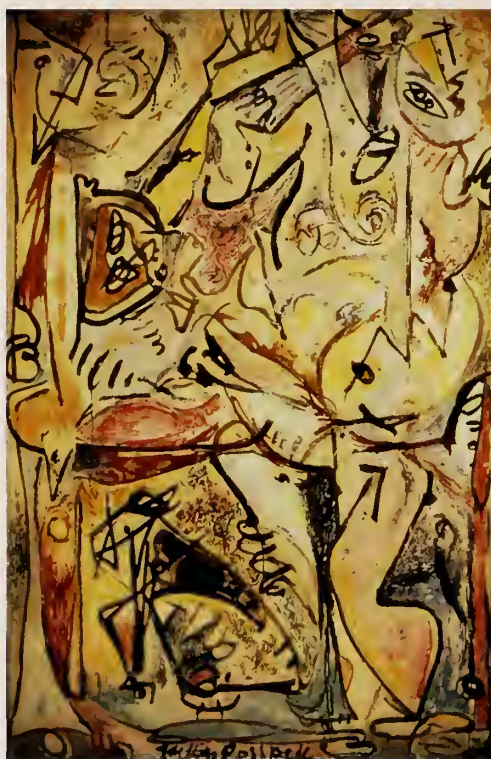
7. Helen Frankenthaler, *Large Abstract Still Life*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 264.2 cm (54 x 104 inches). Private collection.



8. Henri Matisse, *La Fenêtre bleue* (*The Blue Window*), 1913. Oil on canvas, 130.8 x 90.5 cm (51 ½ x 35 ¾ inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund.



9. Helen Frankenthaler, *The Sightseers*, 1951.
Mixed mediums on paper mounted on board, 155.6 x
171.1 cm (61 1/4 x 67 3/8 inches). Private collection.



10. Jackson Pollock, *The Blue Unconscious*, 1946.
Oil on canvas, 213.4 x 142.2 cm (84 x 56 inches).
Private collection.

continuing and rapid progression. Showing considerably more ease and an experimentation with materials, *Painted on 21st Street* is an explosion in scale spurred by Frankenthaler's attention to the work of older Abstract Expressionists. The composition reflects a more relaxed treatment of the structural drawing of Cubism; in it, the more fluid arm characteristic of Kandinsky and Miró has taken over, manifested in the delicate lines and arabesques that lend an atmospheric quality. Any illusion of depth is disrupted, however, by the buildup of plaster, sand, coffee grounds, and pigment on top of the picture surface. This painting attracted much attention at the artist's first solo exhibition, at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in November 1951. A similar, but much smaller work called *Beach* (1950, fig. 45) had previously been chosen by Gottlieb for a group exhibition called *Fifteen Unknowns* held in December 1950 at the Kootz Gallery, Frankenthaler's debut as a force to be recognized.

Frankenthaler's ardent experimentation and frequent borrowings from other artists can be seen in the diverse body of work she produced in 1951. Studying the paintings of earlier artists who also influenced her New York School peers, she was able to come to her own understanding and unique synthesis of Cubism, Expressionism, and Surrealism. Miró's direct influence on Frankenthaler, for example, appears in an untitled work of 1951 (fig. 5), which repeats Miró's bipartite division of the canvas. Employed in works such as his *Le Chasseur (Paysage catalan)* (*The Hunter [Catalan Landscape]*) (1923–24, fig. 6), this device implies a horizon without using traditional means of perspective. (Frankenthaler would maintain a more subtle use of the divided canvas, which further accentuates the landscape associations, in later works such as *Autumn Farm* [1959, cat. no. 12].) The inconsistent scale and nonhierarchical placement of the anthropomorphic shapes floating across the blue-and-orange background of Frankenthaler's *Untitled* (1951) are also techniques used by Miró. They again challenge the rationality of traditional composition and transform volumetric objects into flat, decorative, surface pattern parallel to the picture plane.

The flat zones of color seen in *Untitled* expand into a solid background in *Large Abstract Still Life* (fig. 7) from the same year. Though Frankenthaler was less actively engaged with the work of Matisse and does not herself make the connection, her exposure to *La Fenêtre bleue* (*The Blue Window*, 1913, fig. 8) in Feeley's seminar seems significant. John Elderfield has drawn attention to a large Matisse exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951–52 that may have triggered the new weight of color in Frankenthaler's art around this time.²⁰ That Greenberg, a close companion of Frankenthaler at that time, wrote a small book on Matisse in 1953 precipitated further her immersion in the French artist's work.²¹ Rothko's luminous fields of color may also have played a role. The richness and depth achieved in Frankenthaler's ocher ground foreshadows the mastery of color that has come to define her painting. Matisse's use of a solid-color background to unify his composition, as in such well-known works as *L'Atelier rouge* (*The Red Studio*, 1911), relates to Frankenthaler's *Large Abstract Still Life*, as does his graphic use of line. The three black arches that seem to grow exponentially out of the stems of the red flowerlike shapes in the left corner of *Large Abstract Still Life* are reminiscent of the black tracery that sprouts from a small plant in the interior scene of Matisse's *The Blue Window*. Flowing into the curving branches of the tree outside, the same line delineates the frame of the window, an architectural allusion similar to Frankenthaler's truncated arcade, which can imply an entire space with only a sketchlike fragment. In both paintings, certain foreground objects become confused with the background, while others seem to float parallel to the surface plane in a manner similar to the objects in the 1951 *Untitled*.

A similar linear framework appears in *The Sightseers* (fig. 9), a large-scale work on paper made in June 1951. In it, background and foreground are more difficult to identify, but a shallow depth is maintained by the Cubist-like intersection of planes. *The Sightseers* shows Frankenthaler's translation of Willem de Kooning's dense maze of enclosed, drawn shapes in works such as *Attic* (1949, fig. 11). Frankenthaler's even treatment of the entire picture surface and the suggestion of



11. Willem de Kooning, *Attic*, 1949. Oil, enamel, and newspaper transfer on canvas, 157.2 x 205.7 cm (61 7/8 x 81 inches). Jointly owned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Muriel Kallis Newman, In honor of her son, Glenn David Steinberg, 1982. The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, 1982.16.3.



12. Jackson Pollock, Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1951. Works shown are *Number 3*, 1951 (*Image of Man*); *Number 16*, 1951; *Number 9*, 1951; *Number 10*, 1951; *Number 14*, 1951; and *Number 6*, 1951 (all 1951).



13. Helen Frankenthaler, *Circus Landscape*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 111.8 cm (40 x 44 inches). Private collection.



14. Vasily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28* (second version), 1912. Oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (43 7/8 x 63 7/8 inches). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Gift of Solomon R. Guggenheim 37.239.

recognizable imagery within the interlocking forms recall de Kooning, although the looseness and openness of her more rounded shapes owe a debt to Pollock and perhaps Gorky.

Despite Frankenthaler's use of de Kooning's black form outlines, she had begun to draw with color, a critical innovation spurred by Pollock's recent all-over drip canvases.²² *The Sightseers* is also reminiscent of Pollock's work from the 1940s, in particular *The Blue Unconscious* (1946, fig. 10), a painting the artist remembers studying in depth when it hung in a friend's home.²³ While Pollock's work retains a linear armature in black, color adds movement to the ballooning shapes without sculptural illusion. More significantly, it is also used directly as line. Pollock's incising on the painted canvas brings our attention to the surface, as do the markings of crayon in *The Sightseers*, which act as a foil to the receding zones of color and recall the agitated surfaces of Impressionist paintings. In *The Sightseers*, Frankenthaler added an additional emphasis to the surface by scrawling "Helen" in the center of the canvas. Seen in relation to Miró's *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, in which "SARD," the beginning of sardine, is inscribed in the lower-right corner in curving letters, Frankenthaler's use of her name can be interpreted in the context of the Surrealist's employment of poetic fragments as well as diaristic content. Frankenthaler has stated that through Pollock's 1951 works she "responded to a certain Surreal element—the understated image that was really present: animals, thoughts, jungles, expressions."²⁴ Hints of veiled personal biography would continue to creep into later works; hidden among the flourishes of paint in *Before the Caves* (1958, cat. no. 8), B. H. Friedman points out, is the number 173, the address of the artist's future husband, Robert Motherwell. The three brown forms to the left in *Mother Goose Melody* (1959, cat. no. 13) have also been said to represent the artist and her two sisters.²⁵ The artist remembers her autograph in *The Sightseers* as more of a whim, a playful means of giving the painting a needed formal element while staking her claim, making her mark.²⁶

Frankenthaler's growing confidence can also be seen in an energetic work entitled *Circus Landscape* (1951, fig. 13),

which illustrates the significant influence of two additional artists (though throughout these early years multiple sources manifested themselves in single paintings). On seeing Kandinsky's early interpretations of landscape at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Frankenthaler renewed her earlier interest in his work. His calligraphic line, watercolorlike use of oil paint, and the airiness of his compositions (see fig. 14) are echoed in many of Frankenthaler's works from the early 1950s. *Circus Landscape*, in particular, recalls Kandinsky's of the early 1910s in its watery, yet Fauve-inspired, palette and in the isolated images floating over the canvas in a sequence suggestive of narrative. This dance of biomorphic shapes also points to Frankenthaler's continued engagement with the Surrealist works of Miró and Gorky. Gorky's fluid use of line, visible in works such as *The Liver Is the Cock's Comb* (1944, fig. 15), is apparent in the Frankenthaler. Bleeding into and out of each other and into his murky backgrounds, Gorky's organic shapes add a Surrealist vision to the Cubist concept of *passage*. Frankenthaler admired Gorky's interpretations of Picasso and Miró, as well as his talent for expressing the materiality of paint and the picture surface. His work achieved a hazy, atmospheric treatment of color that would soon appear in Frankenthaler's own work.

Frankenthaler has stated many times that color was secondary to her, and drawing was her primary focus: "My conscious interest was more in drawing and the drawing of color than in color alone."²⁷ The real turning point in Frankenthaler's development, in fact, occurred in response to Pollock's exhibition of black-and-white paintings at Betty Parsons Gallery in November 1951 (see fig. 12). While color and line had often been maintained as separate entities up to this point in Frankenthaler's work, Pollock's influence would reconcile them. Although Frankenthaler had seen Pollock's allover drip paintings the year before and had felt exhilarated by their sense of endless space and their new language, she was not able to translate what she had experienced into a usable vocabulary. It was not until she encountered Pollock's paintings from 1951 that she found an entryway into his



15. Arshile Gorky, *The Liver Is the Cock's Comb*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 237.5 x 393.7 cm (93 ½ x 155 inches). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, Gift of Seymour H. Knox, 1952.



16. Helen Frankenthaler, *Interior*, 1957. Oil on unprimed canvas, 177.8 x 218.4 cm (70 x 86 inches). Private collection.



17. Helen Frankenthaler, *Number 11*, 1957. Oil and pencil on paper, 27.6 x 35.6 cm (10 7/8 x 14 inches). Private collection.

work without resorting to imitation. Unlike the dense, layered works of the previous year, the more figurative, “stained” paintings made clear to Frankenthaler how painting and drawing could be fused while also stressing the flatness of the support. Pollock’s attention to negative space as a presence “drawn” by black areas of paint was fundamental for Frankenthaler’s breakthrough, which emphasized bare canvas and joined figure and ground in an equal marriage.

Frankenthaler was first introduced to the work of Pollock through the 1949 *Life* magazine article. Later, she admired Pollock’s radical technique, which she came to know through Greenberg, visits to Pollock’s Long Island studio, as well as photographs of the artist at work in a 1951 issue of *Artnews*.²⁸ Frankenthaler began to experiment with a similar approach to the canvas, laying it on the floor and working from above. Working in this vein in October 1952, Frankenthaler created *Mountains and Sea*. Using thinned-down paint, Frankenthaler poured her pigment from coffee cans, as Pollock did from pails, onto unprimed canvas, creating a breathing landscape of shifting planes of color washes. This painting synthesized the influences that had informed Frankenthaler’s work thus far, and, more significantly, announced her arrival as a mature artist with her own signature style. Kandinsky’s mountainous apparitions, Gorky’s skeletal lines, and Pollock’s sense of encompassing space are all present, but *Mountains and Sea* is distinctly Frankenthaler’s.

Translating the fluidity and spontaneity she attained in watercolors, such as the prophetic *Great Meadows* (1951, fig. 39), Frankenthaler achieved with her combination of paint and either turpentine or kerosene a medium that gives a sense of perpetual movement to her canvases. That sense comes not from the movement of the painter, however, as in Pollock’s dripping and pouring, but from the movement of the paint itself. As the thinning agent separates from the weightier paint, it often leaves a surrounding aura emanating out from the blots of color. While the memory of a particular landscape was, she said, “in my arms”²⁹ when she made *Mountains and Sea*, the life of the paint—simultaneously controlled by the

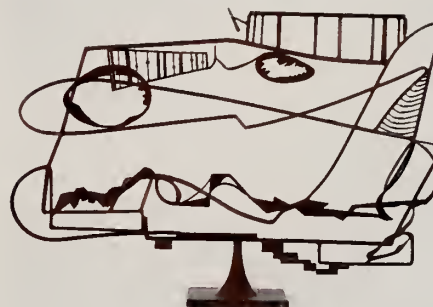
artist and allowed to take its own course, soaking into and through the raw canvas—is just as strong in imparting its organic effect. Moreover, the atmospheric pools of color Frankenthaler spilled onto and into the canvas create an optical depth within the painting yet also maintain the flatness of the canvas. Frankenthaler had finally reached a goal she had been working toward since her early experiments with Cubist space.

Throughout the decade, Frankenthaler continued to investigate the possibilities of her soak-stain technique with increasing variety, combining placid flows of color with energized bursts of paint applied with motions of the wrist. In the mid-1950s, she appears to have been affected by prevailing tastes for heavily worked canvases, producing paintings that, like *Europa* (1957, cat. no. 3), are filled almost entirely with layers of poured paint and leave very little, or none, of the bare canvas revealed.³⁰ A work entitled *Interior* from the same year (fig. 16) is also a dense composition though more characteristic of the late 1950s work in that it retains some exposed canvas. Having firmly established a method of painting guaranteeing flatness, Frankenthaler began in such works to play with spatial devices that would create more tension. By delineating two walls of a room, a table, and chairs, for example, Frankenthaler was almost poking fun at traditional illusionism, because she knew that in her canvases conventional perspective is scarcely possible. The artist used a similar architectonic shorthand in *Eden* (1956, cat. no. 2), which establishes a sense of interior in an open, landscapelike composition. This confusion of interior and exterior parallels her blurring of figure and ground. Dyed into the canvas, the receding lines are held in check, suspended between expectation and denial. Like the arcade noted in the earlier *Large Abstract Still Life*, Frankenthaler's linear frameworks act as both spatial framing device and surface accent, which live in perpetual conflict.

Interior includes a more literal frame as well. The rectangle floating at the top of the painting is a motif that she repeated in several works and continued to use to structure paintings of the 1960s. While it appears in *Interior* as a window, it may



18. David Smith, *The Hero*, 1951–52. Welded painted steel, 187.2 x 64.8 x 29.9 cm (73 11/16 x 25 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches). Brooklyn Museum of Art, Dick S. Ramsay Fund 57.185.



19. David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape*, 1951. Welded painted steel and stainless steel, 126.8 x 187.3 x 42.1 cm (49 11/16 x 73 3/4 x 16 1/16 inches). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase.



20. *Las Mayas*, 1958. Oil on unprimed canvas, 254 x 109.9 cm (100 x 43 1/4 inches), Collection of Irma and Norman Braman.

also resemble a painting within the painting or a passageway out of the canvas into deeper space. As a reflection of the shape of the canvas itself, it draws attention to the limits of the frame. Having a double role as signifier of receding space and as outline of the canvas, the floating square or rectangle repeats the struggle of opposites that continued to occupy Frankenthaler.³¹ The small oil-and-pencil sketch *Number 11* (fig. 17), also from 1957, demonstrates again in simpler terms how the rectangle can be interpreted as a recognizable symbol of perspective. Our eye is immediately led back to the square in the upper-right corner and thus to the space behind the paper. The artist's fingerprints, however, acting much in the same way her signature does in *The Sightseers*, clearly announce her presence. Her mark on the surface brings us back to the flat picture plane, keeping foreground and background in a constant state of flux. This little sketch reveals the structure of many of Frankenthaler's largest works whose compositions are firmly situated in the plane of the canvas yet are surprisingly explosive.

The floating square can also be seen in *Nude* (cat. no. 9), a figural painting made in 1958. In this work, the device is more closely related to the sculpture of David Smith, to whom Greenberg had introduced Frankenthaler in 1950. By the following year, she was visiting Smith's home and studio in upstate New York, and the two formed a strong friendship, one that would affect the work of both artists.³² Although the verticality of the work and its anthropomorphic nature are unusual for Frankenthaler, these qualities are repeated throughout Smith's sculpture. A look at the use of negative space in Frankenthaler's *Nude* makes the link to Smith's work clear. The radical nature of Smith's sculpture resides in its dialogue with painting and its insistence on a frontal orientation, similar to that of a picture plane.³³ Like Frankenthaler, Smith often used a rectangular or square shape, echoing that of a painting frame, to impart the sense of an interior to his sculptures. While Smith capitalized on the palpable presence of empty space, Frankenthaler used bare canvas for similar ends. Smith's frequent use of landscape as subject matter reinforces the similarities between his work and

Frankenthaler's. The relationship between steel and negative space in works such as Smith's *Hudson River Landscape* (1951, fig. 19) is comparable to Frankenthaler's combination of line and flat areas of paint or canvas seen in works such as *Acres* (1959, cat. no. 11). Likewise, the cubelike head of *Nude* strongly resembles the body of Smith's *The Hero* (also called *Eyehead of a Hero*; 1951–52, fig. 18), whose "volume" is formed by the empty space inside the steel rectangle. The triangular breasts punctuating and activating the enclosed negative space in Smith's work are mirrored by the eyes of Frankenthaler's *Nude*, which heighten in similar fashion the play between positive and negative forces. The suggestion of sculptural volume in the head of Frankenthaler's *Nude* becomes more shockingly apparent in its placement above the "body," which is also comprised of the negative space of the canvas. The two differing values of presence integral to the negative space of the "neutral" canvas are established by the use of line to draw (as in the head), which gives a sense of sculptural illusionism, and the use of color zones (as in the body), which remain resolutely flat. Frankenthaler then added yet another level to the spatial ambiguity with a horizontal band of rusty brown paint placed like a bar across the canvas. It functions like the rail of a terrace, separating the viewer of the canvas from the pictorial space. Thus, the body of the nude is transformed into an illusion of open space.

Frankenthaler placed a similar line across the surface of a work called *Las Mayas* (1958, fig. 20), a more literal translation of the balcony in Francisco de Goya's *Majas on a Balcony* (ca. 1800–14) in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Inverting Goya's composition, Frankenthaler dissected the formal structure of the original work as she had done in Feeley's classes by subjecting her art to the question "Would it matter if you put it upside down?"³⁴

Around this time, in keeping with her interest in studies of reflection and balance, Frankenthaler also seems to have been looking back at Pollock's emphasis on negative space in his paintings of 1951. Another vertical painting by Frankenthaler from 1958, *Winter Hunt* (cat. no. 10), makes direct reference to Pollock's stain painting entitled *Number 14* (1951, fig. 21).



21. Jackson Pollock, *Number 14*, 1951. Enamel on canvas, 146.4 x 271.8 cm (57 ⁷/₈ x 107 inches). Tate Gallery, London.



22. Artist unknown, detail of cave paintings at Altamira, Spain, Upper Paleolithic period. Museo y Centro de Investigación de Altamira.



23. Artist unknown, detail of cave paintings at Altamira, Spain, Upper Paleolithic period. Museo y Centro de Investigación de Altamira.

Seeing a foxlike shape formed within the negative space of the canvas in the center of Pollock's painting, Frankenthaler re-created it as a positive reflection, figured in a blackish wolf shape, in *Winter Hunt*.³⁵ Ironically, the hidden image struggles for prominence with the weighty, unpainted, "negative" space of the canvas, which acts as the body does in *Nude*. Two fox shapes are visible again in *Autumn Farm*, and, likewise, are as much background as silhouetted objects.

Frankenthaler's dissolution of the figure-and-ground dichotomy had been fed by even earlier sources. While traveling in Spain in 1953, the artist recounted in a postcard to Greenberg her excited reactions to the prehistoric Altamira cave paintings in Spain (see figs. 22, 23). She related how the "contours of the ceiling match the forms of the animals—e.g., big bump on ceiling where bison's rump is. . . . It all looks like one huge painting on unsized canvas,"³⁶ comparing them to her own paintings. She wrote of their significance to other friends as well, describing them as "½ painting and ½ sculpture" and remarking upon "the rough texture of the ceiling's surface and those beautiful earth and blood colors."³⁷ Several years later, in 1958—also the date of *Nude*—Frankenthaler made *Before the Caves*, a work that recalls her visits to Altamira as well as Lascaux. The work exhibits the earthy colors Frankenthaler had written of in 1953 and the mix of calligraphic drawing and flat areas of pigment seen in the cave paintings. Just as the surface of the rock is integrated with the primitive artists' material, the fibers of Frankenthaler's canvas are one with her paint.

Frankenthaler was, as Rose has written, "painting within the tradition,"³⁸ looking at the art of the past and present while providing a path to the future. Frankenthaler's acceptance of the canvas as a sculptural material, one as primary as the paint she joined to it, was a forward-thinking realization that prefigured the art of the 1960s and 1970s, which would further break down these categories. Frankenthaler herself has stayed away from polemical thinking over the years. Though she has been essentially a formalist, she adeptly negotiated the formalist/gestural debate by maintaining her own vision without directly adhering to

either attitude. She allowed for the illusion of depth—as well as gesture, emotional content, and references to subject matter—in her "flat" paintings. Despite the planes created by her soak-stain technique, Frankenthaler does not consider herself a Color-field painter. Her work lies somewhere between Abstract Expressionism and Post-Painterly Abstraction. It is this position between defined categories or conditions that has led Frankenthaler to be thought of as a transitional artist. Baro reminded us, "Abstract Expressionism was as difficult to develop from as Cubism had been."³⁹ Frankenthaler was an exception in her ability to do so. She "was a bridge," as Louis stated, "between Pollock and what was possible."⁴⁰ Yet Frankenthaler's work, unique in its properties, is its own destination, and, in this sense, the title of and inspiration for *Mountains and Sea* is an apt metaphor for Frankenthaler's work. Struck by the unusual combination of ocean and cliffs she had seen in Nova Scotia, the artist united them again on her canvas; this coming together of perceived opposites is the striking leitmotif that continually provides Frankenthaler's paintings with their originality and that captivates her viewers.

1. Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), p. 16. This book is an invaluable source and gives an excellent description of the environment in which the first- and second-generation New York School artists were working.

2. Carl Belz, *Frankenthaler: The 1950s*, exh. cat. (Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1981), pp. 10–11. See also Phyllis Rosenzweig, *The Fifties: Aspects of Criticism in New York*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, 1980), pp. 15, 23; Clement Greenberg, “American Type Painting,” *Partisan Review* (New York) 22, no. 2 (spring 1955), pp. 179–96; and Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *Artnews* (New York) 51, no. 8 (Dec. 1952), pp. 22–23, 48–50.

3. Quoted in Henry Geldzahler, “An Interview with Helen Frankenthaler,” *Artforum* (New York) 4, no. 2 (Oct. 1965), p. 37.

4. “Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?” *Life* (New York) 27, no. 6 (Aug. 8, 1949), pp. 42–44.

5. Sandler, pp. 15–16, 37.

6. Clement Greenberg, “Post Painterly Abstraction,” *Art International* (Zurich) 8, nos. 5–6 (summer 1964), p. 63.

7. See, in particular, Friedel Dzuhas, “Is There a New Academy?” *Artnews* (New York) 58, no. 6 (Sept. 1959), p. 37, which commented on the “horedom and the seemingly endless repetition of self-sameness” visible on Tenth Street.

8. Quoted in Geldzahler, p. 37.

9. Rosenberg, pp. 22–23, 48–50.

10. Barbara Rose, “Painting within the Tradition: The Career of Helen Frankenthaler,” *Artforum* (New York) 7, no. 8 (April 1969), p. 30.

11. Ibid.

12. I am indebted to both John Elderfield and Barbara Rose for their thorough and sensitive mappings of Frankenthaler’s development in their monographs on the artist. See Elderfield, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989); and Rose, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972).

13. Rose, *Frankenthaler*, p. 16.

14. Gene Baro, “The Achievement of Helen Frankenthaler,” *Art International* (Zurich) 11, no. 7 (Sept. 20, 1967), pp. 33–35.

15. See the artist’s description of her studies with Wallace Harrison in Helen Frankenthaler with Julia Brown, “A Conversation,” in this catalogue. That Frankenthaler chose to work with Harrison during the winter period is characteristic of her tendency to select the road less traveled. Most students opted for the other choice, that is, studying with Hans Hofmann, who was better known.

16. Henry McBride, “The Creative Act,” *Artnews* (New York) 48, no. 10 (Feb. 1950), p. 17.

17. Rose, *Frankenthaler*, pp. 23–24.

18. Rose, “The Second Generation: Academy and Breakthrough,” *Artforum* (New York) 4, no. 1 (Sept. 1965), p. 61.

19. Irving Sandler, “Hans Hofmann: The Pedagogical Master,” *Art in America* (New York) 61, no. 3 (May–June 1973), pp. 48–55.

20. Elderfield, p. 58. The exhibition *Henri Matisse* was held at the Museum of Modern Art, Nov. 13, 1951–Jan. 13, 1952.

21. Frankenthaler, conversation with the author, Dec. 1, 1997. Clement Greenberg, *Henri Matisse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams and Pocket Books, 1953).

22. Elderfield, p. 43.

23. Frankenthaler, conversation with the author, Oct. 2, 1997.

24. Quoted in Geldzahler, p. 37.

25. B. H. Friedman, “Towards the Total Color Image,” *Artnews* (New York) 65, no. 4 (summer 1966), p. 67.

26. Frankenthaler, conversation with the author.

27. Quoted in Baro, p. 33.

28. Robert Goodnough, “Pollock Paints a Picture,” *Artnews* (New York) 50, no. 3 (May 1951), pp. 38–41, 60–61, with photographs by Hans Namuth.

29. Quoted in Geldzahler, p. 36.

30. E. C. Goossen noted that this “period of uncertainty” for the artist produced “her best received works. . . . Less popular and less understood are . . . those recent pictures . . . floated in a field of raw canvas, possibly because they seem to flout the seriousness of painting, which is culturally associated with . . . a worked-over look.” See Goossen, “Helen Frankenthaler,” *Art International* (Zurich) 5, no. 8 (Oct. 20, 1961), pp. 78–79.

31. Dore Ashton, “Helen Frankenthaler,” *Studio International* (London) 170, no. 868 (Aug. 1965), pp. 54–55; and Karen Wilkin, *Frankenthaler: Works on Paper 1949–1988*, exh. cat. (New York: George Braziller, 1984), pp. 66–68.

32. It has been suggested by both Edward Fry (*David Smith*, exh. cat. [New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1969], p. 13) and Karen Wilkin (*David Smith* [New York: Abbeville Press, 1984], p. 100) that Smith’s interest in color in his sculpture was in part due to Frankenthaler’s influence. For a further discussion of this exchange, see also Wilkin, *Frankenthaler: Works on Paper 1949–1984* (New York: George Braziller in association with the International Exhibitions Foundation, 1984), pp. 39–40, 67–68; and Wilkin, “Frankenthaler and Her Critics,” *The New Criterion* (New York) 8, no. 2 (Oct. 1989), pp. 21–22.

33. Fry, p. 11.

34. Rose, *Frankenthaler*, pp. 16–17.

35. Ibid., pp. 39–40.

36. Frankenthaler, postcard with detail of Altamira cave paintings sent from Santander on August 9, 1953 to Clement Greenberg. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

37. Frankenthaler, postcard with detail of Altamira cave paintings sent from Santander on August 9, 1953 to Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Phillips. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

38. Rose, “Painting within the Tradition,” p. 28.

39. Baro, p. 33.

40. Quoted in John Elderfield, *Morris Louis*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986), p. 13.



Spring–fall 1997, Connecticut and New York City

Julia Brown: Did you know from an early age that you had the need to make art?

Helen Frankenthaler: Yes. But early on, painting alone wasn't my primary pursuit. Writing was just as important. I valued the written word, the book, the conversation, the making up of stories. I came from an articulate family. I was always very verbal and loved listening to and writing fiction. I was good at things involving words and pictures, and I was always writing and putting on shows. I would get lost in the worlds of words and paint in every conceivable way. Later, these pleasurable interests of my youth became a deeper concern. After adolescence, I knew that I had something I wanted to investigate and never stop doing. I had no idea what would happen, no plan. I pursued my drive.

I was, in many ways, a difficult child to understand. I was pent up. Sensitive people may have seen that I housed something that they didn't understand, that I didn't yet know about. I had willful determination. While I conformed to the protocol and fine, upper-bourgeois manners and proper window dressings of the social environment and schooling in which I was raised, I was also a renegade and a maverick, and capable of great humor. But I often felt a deep loneliness and sadness. Until one's mind and sense of oneself is formed and becomes free to be expressed, one cannot begin to act on one's interests or talents.

Once one's true talent begins to emerge, one is freer in one way but less free in another way, since one is a captive of this necessity, this deep urge. It's a wonderful gift, but it's also an albatross. It makes one "different." That's why people may be slightly uncomfortable with artists. They house something out of the ordinary that often makes people uneasy.

JB: What was your involvement with writing when you were a student?

HF: Since my youth, on and off, I have written short stories,

poetry, and critical pieces. When I was at Bennington, I started a newspaper. I read the quarterlies at the Co-op, such as *Partisan Review* and *Tiger's Eye*. Studying literary criticism and psychology with Kenneth Burke and Erich Fromm helped form my later attitude and approach in terms of a certain use of language and an appreciation of dreams, feelings, and symbols. It was invigorating; I couldn't digest enough, spin forth fast enough.

JB: But you didn't become a writer.

HF: I continued to write, but I had to become an artist once I was exposed to the thrill and ambiguities of painting. I always loved using the materials of painting.

JB: Looking particularly at your early paintings, when you were just starting to find your voice in the early 1950s, how do you now understand that time in your life? You were making major works in this period. How did you learn so early what it was you had to say?

HF: During the early 1950s, I was able to develop my aesthetic. My work took off from there. I knew early on, in my twenties, what I looked for in any painting and in a painting of mine. It had to do with light, depth, how a painting worked. The combination of my training in Cubism, Kandinsky, and Gorky and the exposure to de Kooning and Pollock in the early 1950s helped form me. I certainly didn't go about consciously thinking that I wanted to make something in particular, or that I wanted to formulate something that looked different. But being the person I was and am, exposed to the things I have been exposed to, I could only make my painting with the methods—and with the wrist—I have.

In 1949, when I first moved to New York from college, and then in the winter of 1950, work was pouring out of me, painting after painting. The more I painted the more I wanted to paint. I had so many ideas I couldn't get them out quickly enough.



24. Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 266.7 x 525.8 cm (105 x 207 inches). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, George A. Hearn Fund, 1957.



25. Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, Yellow on White and Red)*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 207 x 167.6 cm (81 x 66 inches). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift of Elaine and Werner Dannheisser and The Dannheisser Foundation 78.2461.

In 1950 and 1951, I was also directly exposed to all the first- and second-generation artists of the New York School. It was not only my own inner drive that inspired my work but the dialogue and healthy competition with other artists and their work. I learned not to care what was coming out of me, to just let it come. I learned from de Kooning and Pollock and incorporated what I received from their aesthetic into my painting. Eventually de Kooning's influence faded as I came to understand and be able to use the freedom and magical insights of Pollock's work. Clement Greenberg encouraged me to let myself go, not hold anything back, try everything. But, aesthetically, I was totally on my own.

JB: What was it like to be a young woman painting in a time that was dominated by the work and personalities of strong male artists?

HF: I've never thought about it that way. At the time, I felt these were my older comrades or mentors whose work I respected and who, in turn, looked at my paintings. I was a painter with other painters. Maybe I was resented for my gender or youth, I don't know, but, then, the whole second generation of the New York School was probably questioned by the first. Then and now, my concern was and is for good art: not female art, or French art, or black art, or Jewish art, but good art.

It was a matter of being the person I was then and making the paintings I was making. I remember the experience of carrying a painting from my loft on Tenth Street, walking it over with other artists' help, for the Ninth Street Show, where I was to exhibit it. By all standards, the painting [*Untitled* (1951, fig. 5)] seemed huge. Grace Hartigan and Larry Rivers, among a few artists selected from the second generation, also brought over their entries. The exhibition was an invitational; the older artists, many of them somewhat begrudgingly, let us in. When it came to me, I was considered sort of a young whippersnapper but a challenge.

JB: Did you find the New York art community welcoming at that time?

HF: Yes. Hans Hofmann and I liked each other very much, and I was also extremely close to David Smith. They were both good friends, and we nourished each other as colleagues. Their interest was flattering and encouraging. They wanted to look at my work and even, to a certain extent, use it. Hofmann felt a kind of friendly competition with my work for a while, when he made those very turpentiney paintings. It was as if he were saying, “I’ll fix you, you kid. I’ll show you how it’s really done.” Those were very healthy, productive days. We all went to each other’s studios, feeling exposed and challenged by each other’s work and then wanting, in a sense, to have a return match.

If you’re the only person on the block making something—and there’s nobody across the street or down the hall competing with you in a positive way and attempting to outdo your work—then it’s an isolated and often stale situation. Art is such a lonely business anyway, so fragile and unpredictable, and it often comes out stillborn. Having other artists you respect “out there” is very important.

JB: Could you speak a little more about your art-historical influences? Whose work were you looking at in the 1950s? What made the strongest impression on you?

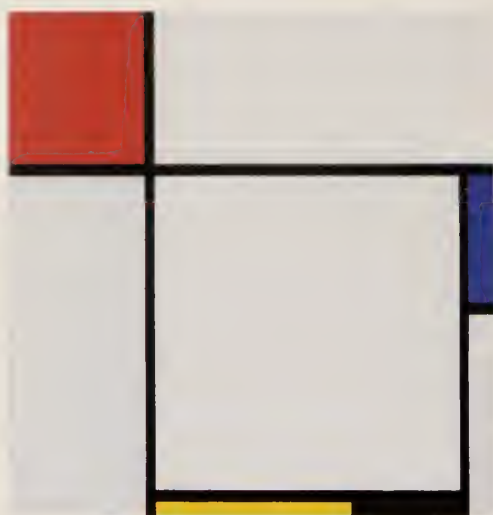
HF: Basically, the art that helped form me in my college years was the Analytic Cubist work of Braque and Picasso (and even some of the later Braque and Picasso), early Kandinsky, and Miró. Along the edges were Matisse and Mondrian. I studied and analyzed the structure of their paintings exhaustively. I looked hard at Matisse’s *Blue Window* [1913, fig. 8], Miró’s *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird* [1926, fig. 26], Cézanne’s *Card Players* [1890–92, fig. 27], and Mondrian’s grid paintings [see fig. 28], as well as works by Léger, the Renaissance and Quattrocento artists, Old Masters, American masters, and African art, all the art I could find.



26. Joan Miró, *Personnage, lançant une pierre à un oiseau* (*Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*), 1926. Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm (29 x 36 1/4 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase.



27. Paul Cézanne, *Les Joueurs de cartes* (*The Card Players*), 1890–92. Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 81.9 cm (25 3/4 x 32 1/4 inches). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960.



28. Piet Mondrian, *Composition; Composition with Red, Yellow, Blue, and Black*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 45 x 45.5 cm (17 1/4 x 17 7/8 inches). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift of the Estate of Katherine S. Dreier 53.1347.



29. Arshile Gorky, *Agony*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 128.3 cm (40 x 50 1/2 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, A. Conger Goodyear Fund.

In the 1940s, I had looked at Matisse and was influenced by his work and followed it, and now I'm passionate about him. In the early days, I appreciated him, but he didn't push me into my own direction. He was a colorist, and I was more affected by Analytic Cubist drawing. By 1950–51, Pollock, de Kooning, and Rothko, and the entire New York School had become my mentors. By the time I made *Mountains and Sea*, in 1952 [cat. no. 1], I'd already departed from the strict language of Cubism, and I'd digested the influence of Pollock, Gorky, and de Kooning. In the 1950s, I looked at a whole range of art. I went to museum and gallery shows, visited other artists' studios, and traveled as much as possible. And I painted and painted and painted.

Gorky's work was very important to me. I saw *Agony* [1947, fig. 29] and *The Liver Is the Cock's Comb* [1944, fig. 15] in his exhibition at the Whitney on Eighth Street in 1951, a show that impressed me enormously. Since I had been so drawn to Kandinsky, the leap represented by Gorky made perfect sense. I also saw many of the 1940s Pollocks during that period as well as his later webbed enamel paintings. The New York School artists had emerged from various influences and had developed their own statements.

Part of the size change in my work was due not only to Pollock but also to the work I saw at Betty Parsons's gallery: huge Stills, Rothkos, and Newmans. By then, I knew some of these artists personally and would visit their homes and studios. The circle also included Gottlieb, Stamos, Reinhardt, and Baziotes.

In the later 1950s and early 1960s, I was very moved and intrigued by Louis's *Veils* and *Unfurleds* and Noland's targets and chevrons. I had long since made *Mountains and Sea* when I first saw those paintings. Their work departed from mine, used it, and developed from there. They wanted, and it's a beautiful idea, to invent a new way of putting color down without gesture or subject matter. Mondrian did that, but he came to pure abstraction differently. Looking at his early work such as the pear-tree drawings, you can see his emergence from Impressionism to Cubism until he finds his own language. Impressionism and Cubism are allied. I believe

in the importance of tradition and one school of the highest quality spawning the next.

JB: What was it you were drawn to in Pollock's work?

HF: His work simply seemed to resonate. It captured my eye and my whole psychic metabolism at a crucial moment in my life. I was ready for what his paintings gave me. It felt right. He opened the way for me and freed me to make my own mark and my own contribution. Of all the work of the first-generation New York School that I was exposed to, Pollock's painting really made me want to investigate and understand his work and his methods. My concern was, always, where would one go from there? In my love and pursuit of any of the Old Masters, or Cubists, or Manet, Monet, Miró, Gorky, or Pollock, I would wonder how they made their paintings and want to understand them, and take it from there. Sometimes I'd use their works and make my kind of abstract response.

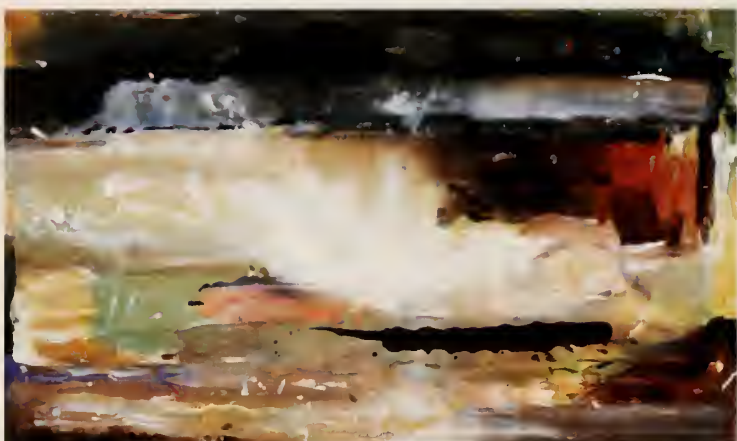
For example, I didn't understand Manet until I made *For E. M.* [1981, fig. 32], a version of his painting called *Fish (Still Life)* [1864, fig. 33]. When I first concentrated in the 1950s on Manet's art, those whose opinions I respected were ecstatic about his work, but I eventually came to appreciate it through my own painting. Only then could I realize how and why he did what he did with space; how, in certain portraits, he made the background fade away yet somehow brought it up front. Until then, I couldn't understand his huge influence as a truly modern painter and the way he made his paintings both three-dimensional and flat. There is his joining of background and foreground. As a result, the space that is created is ambiguous and your eye moves into his painting but then returns to the surface. Many of Manet's standing figures have no floor delineated beneath them, and they often seem to have no true background. In Manet's paintings, the wall may blend into the floor as one overall ground without any separation. This tension and pull between background and foreground can also be seen in late portraits by Rembrandt [see fig. 34], in which the dabs of paint on the figures might be large and rough. A ruddy nose or fur lapel can be the key to the whole



30. Morris Louis, *Alpha Alpha*, 1960. Acrylic resin on unprimed canvas, 266.7 x 383.5 cm (105 x 151 inches). Collection of William S. Ehrlich and Ruth Lloyds.



31. Kenneth Noland, *Bloom*, 1960. Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 170 x 171 cm (67 1/4 x 67 1/4 inches). Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.



32. Helen Frankenthaler, *For E. M.*, 1981. Acrylic on canvas, 180.3 x 292.1 cm (71 x 115 inches). Private collection.



33. Edouard Manet, *Poissons (Nature morte) (Fish [Still Life])*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 73.4 x 92.1 cm (28 7/8 x 36 1/4 inches). The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection 1942.311.

painting. The rest of the face is there, behind that, but it's also right next to it, on the same plane as the nose. And so is the amorphous background. The same is true of Goya. Or look at Matisse: he pulls the background into the foreground [see fig. 35]. In a Matisse, a background or wall can be part of the hair, shoulder, or arm of his central subject. He's always joining planes and spaces out of necessities demanded by the picture surface.

JB: How did you feel about Monet?

HF: I looked hard at his work and honored it, but in the 1940s and 1950s, his issues were not mine. That happened later in the 1970s and 1980s, when I wanted to use all that Monet could teach me. In the early days, I was more involved in both the frontal character and the depth of Picasso's and Braque's drawing. I didn't care so much about the color. I was struck by the spatial pushing back and pulling forward in their work, and by seeing how an area of a painting could be miles away but simultaneously right smack up front. By 1951, Hofmann gave me somewhat the same message with the addition of color. I came to the great colorists, Matisse and Monet, much later.

JB: Could you comment on the influence and nature of your early training?

HF: From early on, from my last year in high school, all the teachers who influenced me were themselves strongly influenced by Cubism. I learned to apply the rules and laws of Analytic Cubism to everything I looked at. In high school, I studied with Rufino Tamayo, and during my college years, with Paul Feeley at Bennington. During the nonresident terms, I studied with Vaclav Vytlacil at the Art Students League, and I worked in Wallace Harrison's drawing class in New York.

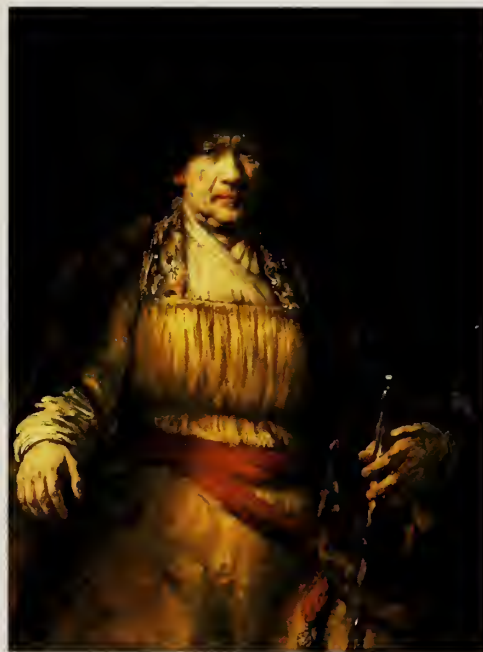
Wallace had all of us working on typewriter-size pieces of paper with greasy, heavy-lead pencils. We would shade squares and rectangles in gray, black, and white, and we all had two kinds of erasers, the gummy, gray ones and the

crumbly, beige, chunky ones. I would spend weeks working on one piece of paper taped to a shirt cardboard that rested on a table or on my lap; erase and redraw, pencil, shade, and erase again. Wallace would go around the class, and often he would imply he didn't know quite where you were going, that he really wasn't yet satisfied with your effort, that he wanted something more. Then you'd go back to the drawing, and he'd look at it again and keep talking to you, pushing you to go further. It was a great exercise. Starting out, I would wonder what he had in mind and what he wanted me to do. In the end, I knew. Eventually, I was allowed to work with a sable brush and gouache in chalky grays, blues, or pinks, but no bright colors, and only shapes that came out of necessity, as a result of the joining of squares and rectangles. For me as a student, it was an intensified version of Cubism and another approach to Hofmann's much more colorful push/pull of planes as well as a thorough investigation of drawing. Color was not the main concern. There was so much emphasis on drawing that by the time I used color it was a departure into another realm. In 1951 and 1952, I made many paintings with loose drawing on either sized, primed canvas, such as *Garden Maze* [1952], or on paper, such as the watercolor *Great Meadows* [1951, fig. 39], both of which were harbingers of *Mountains and Sea*.

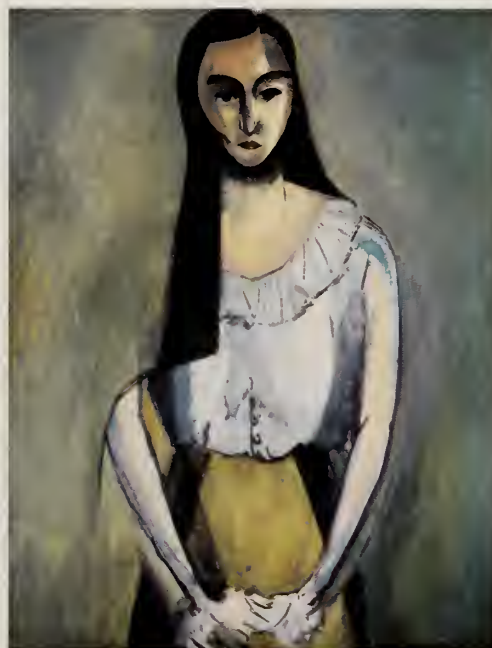
I still carry with me some of the strict lessons of my youth. All that training in the late 1940s was of utmost importance. It was a discipline that was liberating.

JB: To what extent is landscape a theme or subject in your paintings? Do the things you experience in traveling—such as the art you see, a view, or the natural light in particular places—become sources for your work?

HF: Landscape is a loaded question for an abstract painter. When one looks at an abstract horizontal canvas, one more or less consciously perceives nature or a horizon or a view. One is not apt to think of a figurative reference, which is more apt to be vertical. Looking specifically for figures or landscape in abstraction can sometimes inhibit the ability to recognize a



34. Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait*, 1658. Oil on canvas, 133.7 x 103.8 cm (52 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 40 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches). The Frick Collection, New York.



35. Henri Matisse, *L'Italienne (The Italian Woman)*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 114.1 x 89.5 cm (44 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, By exchange 82.2946.



36. Vasily Kandinsky, *Schwarze Linien* (Black Lines), 1913. Oil on canvas, 129.5 x 131.1 cm (51 x 51 3/4 inches). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift of Solomon R. Guggenheim 37.241.

picture's true quality. I am affected by nature, and I have made many paintings both "about nature" as well as those that imply the figure, but it's really not a primary concern of mine.

I painted *Mountains and Sea* after seeing the cliffs of Nova Scotia. It's a hilly landscape with wild surf rolling against the rocks. Though it was painted in a windowless loft, the memory of the landscape is in the painting, but it also has equal amounts of Cubism, Pollock, Kandinsky, Gorky.

Travel has definitely affected my work. Maybe my need to travel was greater in my youth than it is now. I still have a tremendous appetite for seeing paintings and landscapes, yet I no longer need outside influences and stimuli as I did before. I carry them with me and can conjure up a lot in my mind. I rely more on what comes from within. As I always have, I depend most on my inner self and the actual process of painting. I think everything one experiences, feels, dreams, hears, and sees in a day comes out in your art somehow.

JB: How important is specific source material to your painting, and do you want your work to have a "subject"? Do you consider "subject" when you look at other artists' work?

HF: Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse were concerned with how to make a picture work—its scale, its light, its "just rightness"—whether the work was vertical or horizontal, a landscape with figures or not, a painting with people in a scene or in a void. The painting's overall magic, that crucial dab of paint here or there, is what makes it all work. That there is a citron at the foot of a Manet figure [fig. 37] has very little to do with the fact of a citron. Manet needed something of that color and shape there, and that spot of color refers to every other millimeter of the canvas. We can't consider Manet's paintings only in terms of subject—a woman with a parrot, a boy with a straw hat in front of a table—any more than we can look at Cézanne's horizontal bathing scenes only as figures in landscapes. Where Cézanne really demonstrates the integrity of his work's abstract properties is in the later watercolors that are composed of perhaps two or three magically spaced strokes of a few colors. For me, a majority

of the later Velázquez, Rembrandt, and Titian works have as much to do with paint as they do any given subject. The history of painting demonstrates that the application of paint can become the subject. Whether that is enough, and where it goes from there, is another question.

When I first experience a great Quattrocento painting or an Impressionist painting, a Mondrian, Pollock, or the best of Louis or Noland, if I like it as a painting, then it hits me and knocks me out. However, subject matter in a representational painting might be a bonus if one is moved by the artist's feeling for his or her subject, but one can't rely today on subject matter as we've known it. Somehow a new course must emerge. At this point, when I am in pursuit of "a place to go" from where I am, I often go back to nature, the figure, or still life in order to trigger a leap into the unknown.

JB: Isn't the unknown the territory and pursuit of art? Was that the case with *Mountains and Sea*?

HF: Shock for its own sake is simply fashion and is usually transient. At first, genuinely new approaches are startling if not shocking. Usually there is a relatively small number of people who recognize that the work is meaningful, lasting. Some may not fully understand it but respect it nonetheless. *Mountains and Sea* was first looked at with anger. It was vandalized in rage. Some people saw it as a blown-up paint rag, something you wipe your brushes on, not something you frame.

I myself was somewhat puzzled by it when I first saw it before me, but I also was aware I'd made something new and shouldn't fool with it one bit further. It appeared and gave me a message, and I knew it was complete.

JB: How do you know when a painting is finished?

HF: It's crucial to know when to stop. For example, in *Eden* [1956, cat. no. 2], which I painted a few years later, I included a hand that might refer to the hand of God in the Garden of Eden, but it was also a stop sign. One can belabor and worry



37. Edouard Manet, *Jeune Dame en 1866* (formerly *La Femme au perroquet*) (*Young Lady in 1866* [*Woman with a Parrot*]), 1866. Oil on canvas, 185.1 x 128.6 cm (72 7/8 x 50 3/4 inches). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Erwin Davis, 1889.



38. Helen Frankenthaler, *Madridscape*, 1959. Oil on unprimed canvas, 259.1 x 410.2 cm (102 x 161 inches). The Baltimore Museum of Art, Anonymous gift BMA 1966.54.

a painting. Very often, the artist spells out for the viewer what should instead be pieced together consciously or subconsciously. A painting, no matter how labored it is, should have a kind of immediacy, a freshness and shorthand that leave it to the viewer to fill in the rest. If you spell it out to perfection, you often get a very studied painting that implies too much concern with the audience.

JB: What do you do if you feel you've taken a wrong turn or gone too far in a painting?

HF: One method is to keep going, overwork the painting, then look at it and feel you've lost what you had and can't redeem it. You realize that what you've lost is a certain spontaneity, an energy, a truth. You recognize that what you see before you has been spoiled. Sometimes you can dig in again and retrieve the painting and make it something else. Then it acquires another kind of spontaneity. It becomes a more worked-into or scrubbed surface, often darker, more dense. You have salvaged its essence. Matisse demonstrates this in his work repeatedly. When I've gone too far, I might work back into the surface until I've corrected it and have wrenched the painting out of itself, and, I hope, rescued it. Sometimes that can take a great deal of walking back and forth in the studio over and over again, judging the painting from a distance and close up. This usually takes place in one or two days, but sometimes I'll return to a painting much, much later, occasionally, but rarely, years later. Sometimes I destroy a work as a dead loss. One needs to stand back and look at the work on the wall and become one's own critic. But you have to be careful because that's when misjudgments can be made. At other times, you need to just leave a painting. Never force yourself to like a painting if something in you says it's not the best.

JB: Do you ever plan paintings in sequence or in series?

HF: Every painting might appear to be different from the next when it is actually part of a body of work that is similar in

feel and approach. I'm not a painter who works with formulas or in series, although there are concentrated periods when I make several pictures within a theme. For example, the *Swan Lake* series [1961] or the pictures that followed all contained a square and a central motif including *Small's Paradise*, *Buddha's Court*, and *Interior Landscape* [all 1964].

I have two modes of working. One is the spontaneous, immediate gesture of walking up to a piece of canvas or paper, or litho stone or anything else, with a feeling in my head, my mind, my heart, my arms, all synchronized to know exactly what might pour out, what I want to do. The result is never exactly what I "saw" or imagined, but when it's manifest I recognize it and feel it's complete. The other way is the wrenched-out, redeemed picture I just described.

JB: Do you make drawings or sketches to plan out a painting before you begin?

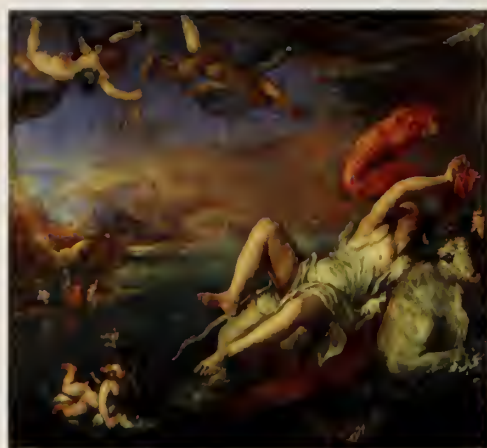
HF: Never deliberately. There was the work on paper *Great Meadows*, from 1951, which was a really big step, unplanned, toward the making of *Mountains and Sea*. There was also the work on paper *Madridscape*, which I made in Madrid before making the painting of the same title [1959, fig. 38]. When I painted *Mountains and Sea*, I first sketched in the charcoal lines on the canvas. I had painted landscapes outdoors all summer in Nova Scotia. I often made small landscapes simultaneously with abstract paintings; it's a good exercise. In the 1950s, I painted many landscapes in New Jersey, Vermont, and other locations.

JB: Do you visualize a painting before you start creating it?

HF: Yes, to some degree. Sometimes, especially at night, I will see a whole painting in my mind and I'll jot down notes on how it looks and often use the notes in the studio later. I tend to give myself challenges that I see in my mind's eye: what would happen if? and then I "write it down" on the canvas. With *New York Bamboo* [1957, cat. no. 5], for example, I thought, supposing I were to paint this picture only in black



39. Helen Frankenthaler, *Great Meadows*, 1951. Watercolor and synthetic polymer paint on paper, 56 x 77.4 cm (22 x 30 1/2 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase.



40. Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), *Europa* (also known as *The Rape of Europa*), 1562. Oil on canvas, 178.7 x 205.5 cm (70 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 80 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches). Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

and leave half the painting empty? Would it work? And I went about doing just that. Experiment and discovery. The actual result can never be what's in the mind's eye, and it doesn't always work. When I saw the Titian in Boston, *The Rape of Europa* [1562, fig. 40], it knocked me out. So I made my version in the painting that I called *Europa* [1957, cat. no. 3]. I can set up an experiment for myself that deals only with the corners, center, or edges of the canvas—with contours or lines—but once the painting is completed, I might have reworked the entire original experiment. As I develop a particular painting, I depart from a concept and reach instead into the demands of the canvas before me. What's coming through is telling me I must go elsewhere. So while I might give the opening direction, the painting, as it progresses through my mind and body, determines its own journey to completion.

JB: Are you referring to the imperative of the painting itself, that is, the way in which it takes on its own life and demands a particular course?

HF: Well, there has to be that dialogue in which you both surprise yourself and allow for the process of carrying out what you have envisioned. When Matisse made a portrait, he might have first put his subject on a stool, or in front of a mirror, or behind a piano; he might have had an idea to begin with, but the painting took him elsewhere. He might have put in something that disturbs the entire chin line and makes the chin part of the wall, because that's what the painting required. The person as figure remains, but changes. Painting is a constant process of renewal and discovery. It's invigorating. And it's a gift that is spontaneous, immediate, felt, absorbing. You know it when you see it. You can't explain exactly how and why a painting works. Understanding and appreciating painting take time and effort.

JB: There is also the role of the unconscious in the painter and the viewer, how one understands an image and subject even if it is not completely articulated. It's a nonverbal, intuitive process.

HF: What isn't there is as important as what is there. Yet it's all there in a kind of shorthand. Your eye, your mind, completes shapes and meanings for you. In making a painting, you have to allow for the awareness in you that is not fully conscious, allowing for the disorder or chaos that is not yet order, the kind of chaos sometimes expressed in dreams. Then, consciously, you try to read the message. Having a dream, thinking about that dream, telling the dream, and discussing a dream are very different experiences. I can know something in a subconscious, nonverbal way, then realize it through making a painting. You never make exactly what is in your mind, because methods and materials and conscious awareness change the original thought. And, of course, you are then working with a material thing and not only a thought. Just as novelists are sometimes overtaken by their characters, artists are also influenced by the shapes, lines, and colors that place demands upon them and the final painting. The artist has to have a dialogue with what is being created.

JB: How did you discover the technique of staining the canvas?

HF: The materials I used in 1952 to make *Mountains and Sea* were not part of a concentrated effort to discover a technique of soaking and staining into raw, unsized, unprimed, cotton-duck canvas. I didn't realize all that I was doing. I didn't try staining per se. I was trying to get at something. I didn't know what it was until it was manifest. The method I used developed and departed essentially from Pollock. I did use his technique of putting the canvas on the floor. But in method and material, Pollock's enamel rested on the surface as a skin that sat on top of the canvas. My paint, because of the turpentine mixed with the pigment, soaked into the wool and weave of the surface of the canvas and became one with it. I had no plan; I just worked. The point was how to get down the urgent message I felt somehow ready to express, in the large, free scale it demanded.

I had no desire to copy Pollock. I didn't want to take a stick and dip it in a can of enamel. I needed something more

liquid, watery, thinner. All my life, I have been drawn to water and translucency. I love the water; I love to swim, to watch changing seascapes. One of my favorite childhood games was to fill a sink with water and put nail polish into it to see what happened when the colors burst upon the surface, merging into each other as floating, changing shapes.

Along with the soaked-in stain technique, I was joining colors together in order to make lines. I still often do this but perhaps now in different ways. Look at *Eden* again, for an example, or *Other Generations* [1957, fig. 41]. In order to make a circle or any other shape, apples or pure abstractions, you don't have to make a black outline and fill it in. You can make a colored shape that acts as a line, using various colors that are necessary to create that circle and make it work. The apple per se has to be forgotten. The subject matter is left behind. My concern is what's before me even if it originally derived from something else. Color and drawing become one.

JB: Are you saying your painting is more an investigation of drawing than an investigation of color? Do you see color as a tool or part of the language but not an end in and of itself?

HF: Even if you think of Matisse and Monet as supreme colorists, the drawing of their color, and the choice, the "putting down," the exact placement of that color are in large part what makes their paintings work. Another perfect example of what I'm talking about is the crucial dot of red that frequently appears in a Corot landscape, truly bringing the painting to life and making your eye explore surface and depth.

Essentially, I think color comes out of drawing. Even if it appears as if color is the primary consideration in a painting, the placement of a specific color is of equal importance. Color is used as you need it within a painting as the image emerges. That process determines whether it's the right color or the wrong color. One of my various methods is to mix many pails of colors that I might want to use before I start working on the canvas. In this way, through the joy of color alone, I can begin a painting by simply putting my colors down and



41. Helen Frankenthaler, *Other Generations*, 1957. Oil on unprimed canvas, 174.7 x 177.9 cm (68 7/8 x 70 inches). National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



42. Claude Monet, *Le Pont japonais* (*The Japanese Footbridge*), ca. 1920–22. Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 116.3 cm (35 1/4 x 45 7/8 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Grace Rainey Rogers Fund.

drawing with color as I go, sort of the reverse of what I'm doing if I begin with drawing and let the color follow. I have mixed reactions when I'm told my work is supposed to be the embodiment of lyricism and brilliant color. I have always made many dark works in all mediums.

JB: There's a lot of light and color in the dark work as well.

HF: The lightest palette can be a dead weight, just as a dark painting can burst with light. I look at Rembrandt, Matisse, and Monet's late Giverny bridge scenes [see fig. 42] that are painted in dark brown tones. They are fantastic in their play on depth, their light.

JB: Are the associative qualities of color important to you? There are many different interpretations of color. Is it important to you that what you intend is what someone else is going to see as well?

HF: Probably no to both questions. Painting may begin with associations, but as I've said there are the demands of the painting itself. It depends on where and how the color is used. Cerulean blue doesn't have to mean sky. Green doesn't have to mean grass. One is left with the painting, not the artist's intentions.

JB: What about space? Are you interested in creating empty and full space, negative and positive space? Or do you see it all as one presence?

HF: I see it all as presence. For me, the best paintings always have spatial depth. I totally honor, and indeed was affected by, Noland and Louis as colleagues. In their case, the point was the field of the surface and how to put color down, pure color, without traces of action or identification with subject. But, as I read them, their best paintings also have a spatial dimension. For example, the color choices of the diagonal bands of a Noland recede or come forward and yet lie side by side in an often magic arrangement. The so-called unpainted negative

space in the center of a vast Louis can be a canyon of depth.

I frequently leave areas of raw, unprimed canvas unpainted. That “negative” space has just as active a role as the “positive” painted space. The negative spaces maintain shapes of their own and are not empty.

It’s fascinating to trace the development of spatial changes in painting. Part of Cézanne’s genius was to tilt his space toward the front surface plane of the canvas. Analytic Cubism took it from there. Perspective and surface played new games. Hofmann’s push-and-pull theory came from Cubism. I still read any good Pollock, Hofmann, Louis, Noland, or any good anybody, in terms of the availability of a “front and back,” a negative and positive. In my own work, I think that’s where I departed from Greenberg’s theories and what came to be called Color Field painting. I wanted more than a surface field of color or thick paint.

JB: Has your painting process changed very much since the 1950s?

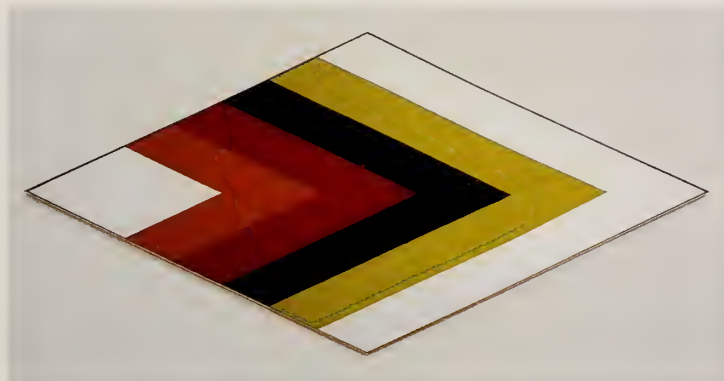
HF: To some extent. At times, I’ve used many more materials or more paint, more texture, or tinted the canvas before working on it. I even flirted briefly with gels mixed into my pigment, and spray cans. I’ve used a variety of tools including brushes, squeegees, sponges, hardware such as windshield wipers, and utensils such as basters or scrapers. Basically, my original process of pouring and brushing remains the same. Recently, I’ve worked on paper more than on canvas. However, my goals haven’t changed. I still believe in the imperative of beauty and in working without rules no matter what process is followed. Over time, we’re left with the best. Paintings and attitudes toward them eventually fall into place.

JB: Are you always working, either through a daily routine or some sort of artistic discipline, so that you can readily use the ideas that may come to you? Do you keep a working process going?

HF: Not always. If I paint, keep working, a lot is bound to



43. Pablo Picasso, *Portrait de Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* (*Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*), 1910. Oil on canvas, 100.6 x 72.8 cm (39 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches). The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Gilbert W. Chapman in memory of Charles B. Goodspeed 1948.561.



44. Kenneth Noland, *Transwest*, 1965. Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 260 x 522.3 cm (102 3/4 x 205 1/2 inches). Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



45. Helen Frankenthaler, *Beach*, 1950. Mixed mediums on canvas, 86.4 x 81.3 cm (34 x 32 inches). Private collection.



46. Helen Frankenthaler, *Ed Winston's Tropical Gardens*, 1951. Mixed mediums on paper mounted on board, 94.6 x 460.4 cm (37 1/4 x 181 1/4 inches). Private collection.

happen, more than if I interrupt the rhythm and then begin again. But, occasionally, a break is refreshing. A very long break is frightening and usually creates dramatic aesthetic changes. I tend to focus on a body of work intensely and one day put down the brush and feel emptied out. I realize that I need to shift gears before I paint again. You have to be careful not to become too comfortable with your methods or style.

When not working, often part of what can happen to an artist is a certain buildup of guilt from the possession of one's gift, a hidden rage that becomes a depression until the gift is used again. The way to overcome that raging depression is to work as if survival depended on it. There is no freedom until the true self is expressed, and the only way is through work. I will often get back to painting after a break and panic and not know where I left off. I seem to start at day one again. I sit around and sharpen pencils, make phone calls, eat handfuls of pistachios, take a swim. I feel I should, must, will paint. It is agony. It is boredom. I become impatient and angry with myself, until I reach a point of feeling I must start, make a mark, just make a mark. Then, hopefully, I slowly get into a new phase of work.

If one is fortunate enough, some ironic humor and a sense of distance help. It helps to think that an artist is subject to the rhythm of two wills: the will of life and the will of art. They have different rhythms. Which energy is stronger?

JB: I'd like to go back to the early work and ask about the change in scale you made from the very early 1950s paintings, which had a great deal of paint on the surface, such as *Beach* [1950, fig. 45] or *Circus Landscape* [1951, fig. 13], and the looser, stained works of your signature style. In the very early 1950s, your paintings and works on paper were crowded and tightly constructed, every part of the surface filled in. In *Mountains and Sea* and thereafter, you discovered a new space in your painting.

HF: Those early paintings and works on paper are still full of Kandinsky, Gorky, and some de Kooning. *Ed Winston's Tropical Gardens* [1951, fig. 46] has de Kooning's enamel,

kidney-shaped lines at the bottom. While influenced in 1951 by early de Kooning, such as his *Painting* [1948, fig. 47], I was simultaneously and more profoundly overwhelmed by Pollock. By starting out with semi-outlines, I developed the knowledge and freedom to eventually eliminate the outlines of enamel and charcoal and get my shapes and geometry and order differently. *Mountains and Sea* has some of the remaining lines in it. That doesn't mean that today I couldn't go back to playing with lines with the same freedom of the 1950s. At times, I go back to *Mountains and Sea* as a source. I've gone a long way since then in years and in painting, but by referring to it I often get a fresh start into the unknown.

I was very moved by how Pollock literally got into his paintings and choreographed the surface. There seemed to be no boundaries, he entered into the surface. I think what probably struck all of us in Pollock was that he was reaping a new order. You sense an enormous, enveloping space, as if your peripheral vision were endless, and you could believe both the depth and the surface and extent of it. The canvas lay on the floor as if it had no edges, as if he could go on and on with this ordered dance, paint until the painting demanded that he stop. De Kooning's treatment of the surface was different. I felt his was a more traditional approach to painting. I was never, using Harold Rosenberg's term, an "action painter." I did not want to demonstrate strong gesture or brushstroke. Nor did I choose Pollock's drip. Cubism had another kind of action or movement, playing foregrounds against backgrounds, and empty spaces against rather crowded spaces. That was appealing to me. I have always been concerned with painting that simultaneously insists on a flat surface and then denies it. This was a primary issue for me. I wanted to move painting forward using these elements of Cubism.

Action painting implies a kind of running across the canvas, a sort of Hansel and Gretel trail of physical action. Cubistic space is more contained. It plays with the surface yet pulls your eye backward and forward with shifting planes of space. Taking paintings off the easel introduced a whole new space and manner of painting. Easel painting had been more



47. Willem de Kooning, *Painting*, 1948. Enamel and oil on canvas, 108.3 x 142.5 cm (42 7/8 x 56 1/4 inches). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase.

of a window than a wall. Once freed from the easel, and not confined to an edge, corner, or particular size, your vision can go on forever, without a sense of limitation. The painting surface is up front, like a screen. It is a matter of scale not size alone, which establishes a space that is expansive but not illusionary. You can enter the space of the painting without denying the surface.

I feel now, and I have always felt this way, that an idea doesn't have to be manifest on so many yards of wall space. The scale inside the painting is what's important. There can be a lot of space in a tiny painting. But sometimes the space you are after insists on a larger area. I've made small paintings as well as big ones.

JB: Has Asian art been an influence on your work? I am thinking of the active presence of empty space in your paintings, the sense of the unconscious, and the grace with which your paint falls.

HF: If you are asking about a sense of the core, balance, or internal spirit, some people make more of that in my painting than I do consciously. I've never concentrated on those qualities in my art, but in life I'm more and more aware of that meditative spirit.

JB: Is music important to you?

HF: The older I get the more I want to turn to music for solace and order. I like to listen to music at night. Listening to Mozart, Verdi, and Bach, for example, along with the magic of their music, I am fascinated by the order of their art, their minds, what they wrote and what they felt, and the sense of peace you get from that order.

JB: Do you see a distinction between the demands of art and the demands of feeling?

HF: In making a work of art, feeling is essential, but feeling alone doesn't work. Very often, paintings are chaotic rather

than cathartic, and they leave you with a sense of malaise rather than a feeling of resolve. But a work is great when you are uplifted, when you gain a sense of order within the work and within yourself. Any work of art that is unresolved makes you feel edgy. For example, if you go to a great play or concert, you feel completed, even though you might feel the subject matter tore you apart; it was a tragic drama. But you have a complete experience that sustains you and stays with you. If it's a great work of art, that order is life-giving and stays with you forever.

JB: What do you feel about beauty and its power as a component of your paintings?

HF: Let's assume to begin with that we're talking about painting that really moves us and is lasting. All beautiful painting has a sense of necessity and urgency, as if it were imperative that the artist make this work, that it had to be born. The painting becomes a means of expressing one's inner gift. It is a catharsis. The quality of true beauty is not describable or definable. Currently, beauty is an unfashionable concept, though I hope it's coming back. I don't get as much yawning when I use the word now compared to a few years ago, when I was told it was obsolete. Some people don't allow for feeling, don't work at looking at painting, and only want to receive. For many, the concept of beauty is too precious, too difficult. But now, perhaps it's beginning to be an answer in itself again.

A true work of art grows on you, you need it. It communicates order and truth. It has a life force. This applies to music, poetry, great architecture, all the arts, not just painting and sculpture. Great art is a manifestation of that magic, that indescribable thing that is the gift. It had to be created. That's part of the gift, and the strong will of art. The making of art starts with chaos and is resolved into order, which can make it beautiful. First, the artist has to manifest the message and then work on the painting until it is totally satisfying, work on the message until it finally emerges and becomes something else which no longer belongs solely to the

artist. Great painting is that wonderful, nonverbal, material thing that expresses the reality of the spirit.

JB: Do you feel that to be a real work of art it must be transcendent in some way?

HF: Yes. Unfortunately, however, all too frequently people are unable to either recognize that quality or miss it if it's absent.

JB: I'm interested in the observation by E. A. Carmean, Jr. that your paintings "are an environment into which we look, and in a similar way, that it is an environment, a place where . . . [you've] been." Is that place physical, intellectual, or emotional?

HF: I hope more the latter, the sense of some abstract place. I wish all titles were totally nonassociative. I have worked in windowless rooms, and I have worked in rooms flooded with light with a landscape immediately beyond the window. I have worked going from one to the other. I have worked in railroad flats, on boats, in hotel rooms. I often conjure up places unknown to me. For example, I was amused because, before I went to Japan and before I went to New Mexico, I made a series of paintings that caused studio visitors to say that they could see a real Zen experience resulting from my visit to Japan, or they could see the colors of the western desert in my recent paintings. I would reply, "I haven't yet gone!" A painting might start with a particular idea I have, but that is only the beginning. On seeing the painting *Buddha's Court*, people might wonder whether I have a special interest in the Orient. Actually, I gave it that title because it's a sort of central image in a confined square space. Is it Buddha with palms outstretched? Did I have that in mind? Perhaps some place. But generally, the title comes from the picture not the picture from the title.

In thinking in depth about the paintings from the 1950s, I have to project back, to concentrate on the exact feeling I had when I was making them, which is difficult. What was coming out of me in those paintings is very different from what I

made later. I was very involved in the emotional, as well as the physical, environment of a space. Interiors and enclosures are a theme in my work along with landscape. For example, when I started *Interior* [1957, fig. 16], I looked around the room and then transposed what I saw onto the canvas. I took a chair, the table, the chair across from the other chair, some plants, and I started with shapes or an abstraction of them. But I started with things within a space. You don't readily see those chairs and table when you look at the painting unless I point them out because that painting is playing with depths and spaces, Cubism and Pollock, and everything that's coming from my imagination. Begun with an experiment to create some kind of sense of space and boundary, *Shatter* [1953, fig. 48] and *Open Wall* [1953, fig. 49] became two of my most abstract paintings. In the end, a spine of the painting, what makes one respond, has very little to do with the subject matter per se but rather the interplay of spaces and juxtapositions of forms. That's true of *Nude* [cat. no. 9, 1958], *Open Wall*, *Eden*, and probably all my paintings ever since.

When you look at paintings such as *Nude* and *Eden*, they play on symmetry—the ambiguities of symmetry. Then there is the matter of what is enclosed and what is seeping out of an enclosure, all of which interact with the surface and the working order of the painting. Symmetry and ambiguity were always of great interest to me. I was interested in the idea of something being symmetrical yet not symmetrical, one side being slightly different from the other, and that difference resulting in all kinds of nuances, creating a balance within asymmetry. In literature and in painting, and in all the arts, the inability to nail down what is the working ambiguity of a work of art is, I think, a part of its interest and beauty.

Some of my paintings have taken off from physical or emotional environments. An emotional environment is perhaps more difficult to determine, to isolate, than a physical one. You can't decide to take your rage or happiness or gloom or fear and direct it onto the canvas. That would be affected, dramatic, and false. But any object or emotion could be a taking-off point to begin with; then release it and go on with



48. Helen Frankenthaler, *Shatter*, 1953. Oil on unprimed canvas, 123.2 x 137.2 cm (48 1/2 x 54 inches). Private collection.

the painting. My concern is that canvas alone and making it work. Other qualities of feeling may come into the picture, along with what you know and what you still have to learn, which may surprise you. I try to allow myself to be free to get lost and not be overly self-conscious.

There is also the issue of being too concerned with your audience. I was interested in the *Corot* show at the Met in the fall of 1996. His really “efficient” Salon paintings seem to have everything admirable in them, yet I think they often are missing a great deal. Many people disagree with me. Was he working to sustain his popularity in the Salon? However, in the later figures and landscapes, which can be superb, I find a freedom of self-expression that doesn’t demonstrate so much effort. Whenever that element of effort enters, when the artist reveals his concern for the audience, there is something wrong, something cynical, and the creative process is no longer pure.

JB: Would you say painting is almost a meditative state?

HF: It’s a matter of letting go. If you really laugh, really cry, or are completely involved in making love, you can become totally lost in the best possible way. In that same sense, truth comes when one is totally involved in the act of painting, somehow using everything one knows about painting materials, dreams, and feelings. Consciously and unconsciously, the artist allows what must happen to happen. That act connects you to yourself and gives you hope. If the painting is good, it gives those qualities to the viewer as well. I think great paintings have a sense of the inevitable. The artist had to create the work in this way. The painter makes something magical, spatial, and alive on a surface that is flat and with materials that are inert. That magic is what makes a painting unique and necessary. Painting, in many ways, is a glorious illusion.

JB: What are your ongoing concerns as a painter?

HF: In no particular order: taking risks, being surprised,

experimenting, wanting to push painting further.

True artistic creation of any kind is a very lonely process, a totally selfish act, and a totally necessary one that can become a gift to others. That's when the painting finds its audience, whether or not it's in the artist's lifetime.



49. Helen Frankenthaler, *Open Wall*, 1953. Oil on unprimed canvas, 136.5 x 332.7 cm (53 7/8 x 131 inches). Private collection.



Voice

The early paintings of Helen Frankenthaler, made between 1950 and 1952, were highly structured and drawn, laying the groundwork for the emergence of Frankenthaler's signature, of what made a painting uniquely hers. *Mountains and Sea*, painted in 1952, established her voice and introduced her way of working. She created an ambiguous space with imagery both resonant and abstract through color stained into the canvas, the combination of form and line, drawing with color, swirling movement balanced by the various weights of her colors, their shapes, and the open areas they define.

The Company of Artists

She combined her formal education with self-education derived from the old masters, traveling extensively to look at paintings, studying and copying the works of great artists of the past in order to absorb the lessons they offered her. Frankenthaler's dialogue with the history of painting is an ongoing and active communion and series of questions with those artists whose work is important to her. Frankenthaler's years during the 1950s in the community of relationships of the New York School of painters, and the so-called second generation, through the exchange of ideas, the camaraderie and the competition, were critical to her development and growth as an artist. Her work emerged in the time of prominence of the Abstract Expressionists, who had created a new vision in painting: heroic, emotional, expansive, American. The work of de Kooning, Kline, Newman, Pollock, Rothko, and Still, among others, opened up a new space in painting that subsumed the viewer and directly engaged the emotions and the spirit through the force of gesture and the power of the sublime. Frankenthaler responded to this new space and language by bringing forth paintings that were a meditative expression of her own state of being, answering the vocabulary of Pollock's webbed and tangled surfaces, de Kooning's and Kline's energy of material and gesture, and Rothko's and Newman's planes of color by sinking her paint into the weave of the canvas and defining a spatial field through a lyrical sweep of color, shape, and line. She drew

upon diverse sources, especially those that had been deeply moving to her during college and prior to her move to New York, such as the Analytic Cubism of Braque and Picasso, the drawing and imagery of Miró, and the atmospheric color of Kandinsky, punctuated by his abstracted line. After her move to New York in 1949, the paintings of Gorky became a touchstone; his allusive imagery, unattached to the edges of the canvas, suggested a kind of ambiguous shallow space contiguous with the picture plane that Frankenthaler incorporated into her own painting.

Subject/Image

Her subject is what is revealed through the process of painting itself and as a sum of influences and experience both immediate and past. The paintings are associative, rather than narrative or descriptive, as well as self-contained, carrying on an internal dialogue. If something—a particular landscape, painting by an old master, or disciplined painting exercise—serves as a source of inspiration or simply as a way to begin, the result is an expression of her feeling about the experience of it, something understood and suggested, an abstraction obtained from something real, filtered through feeling. It is the sense of that experience that is communicated in a language of painting with its own independent life. Her subject is also painting itself and the properties of paint, its degrees of liquidity, how it rests on or in the canvas, and the harmony and engagement of color and form. A dance of abstraction evolves through the process of painting, the artist working within a spatial field and in collaboration with her materials to find the internal space and balance of each painting. The painting is also an abstracted record of experience filtered through memory and feeling, a result, perhaps, of the memory of light on water, the sea against cliffs, a hotel room in Europe, a favorite painting by Goya, and/or the sum of everything that has come before. The subject matter is simultaneously connotative and abstract, the paint sometimes thin as water, light shining through color like sun filtering through leaves. Organic forms, the liquid, floating imagery, seem to be supported by an invisible trellis holding their

energy, comparable to Gorky's or Miró's structure of biomorphic shapes and Kandinsky's surges of color anchored by his drawing.

Felt Landscape

Frankenthaler's discipline of making sketches and watercolors in landscape in the early 1950s, spending time in landscape, being close to land and water, was a source of imagery both directly and indirectly. These experiences translated into influences through a form of osmosis. The sense of an animated, abstracted space is evoked in many of her paintings; in the same way, landscape contains presence in distance, passage between foreground and background, and defined but variable space. The works absorb the colors and light of land and sky, the ever-changing weather, the atmosphere of air, the sometimes amorphous, sometimes distinct line of the horizon, forms gathered in the space of the landscape, the indefinable scale and enigma of nature, the movement and energy of all that is alive in it, its mystery.

Symmetry and Ambiguity

How symmetrical is the human body? How balanced is a tree? Like structures found in nature or resolution that is achieved in a piece of music, the paintings of Frankenthaler contain an organic structure that is neither static nor predictable but still unified. The weight of colors, shape (formed by painted and bare canvas), and line, along with the internal rhythms and movement of the painting, create a nonsymmetrical balance, clarity within ambiguity. As with other aspects of Frankenthaler's work, this quality of combining and resolving opposing tendencies results in an engaging energy within the paintings. The forms are tangible but not specific. There are shifting planes of color and shape in which background and foreground coexist, activating the surface plane and making a shallow, enigmatic space. Suggestions of forms are left incomplete, allowing one's mind to complete them. Ideas form then circle back on themselves or take new directions away from their original impulse.

Process

Following a course dictated by her eye and by the rhythm of her wrist, arm, and body, sometimes initiated by a self-imposed exercise, sometimes in response to an external influence, Frankenthaler's paintings come about through an almost meditative practice combining thought, memory, and feeling with the dictates of the material. The course she follows often results in a painting distinct from the image first seen in her mind's eye, transformed into the image or images brought forth through the creative process. There are the simultaneous exploration of accident and the imposition of control. Spontaneity and a reliance on pure feeling is combined with intellectual rigor and the discipline of work, to work and work more, to be with and in the painting so that whatever is there, or can be found, will emerge, a combination of making the painting and letting it be made. Sometimes it is realized with immediacy, sometimes the process is more labored, the painting discovered, retrieved (or discarded) only after a struggle with its inanimate will.

Drawing and Color

Frankenthaler takes color into line, line into and enclosing shape, creating imagery that is between or both line and shape. She creates areas of color within a field, a sweep of color that leaves evidence of its passage. The painting becomes a form of drawing, drawing about color, energy released from the arc of the arm, the impulse of the wrist within an open surface filled with light. She creates depth and space through drawing. As in architecture, in which a wall, in becoming a boundary, makes space, drawing in these paintings encloses space and in so doing creates it. Drawing becomes a process of thinking, a way of feeling. Color includes its own narrative, reminiscent of color seen and experienced, or is purely itself with inherent balance and movement and many gradations of mood, richness and subtlety, darkness and light.

External and Internal

You are always a sum total of all your experience and yourself at that moment. How do you order the world around you,

how do you communicate what you see and where you are, the place, the time, the feeling? Representing a sense of a physical and emotional space encircled by the body, heart, and mind, these paintings communicate a sense of privacy within the passage of personal experience. There are the repeated subject of interiors and enclosures and the image of the window. The paintings communicate a sense of the personal, of an interior place, yet they are equally open and expansive.

Empty and Full, Open and Spatial

As the spaces between lines of a poem or the pauses in music allow sound and meaning to be heard and understood, the unpainted areas of Frankenthaler's paintings make those that are painted more visible. Vibrant and active, these open areas balance the painted field, bringing light into the painting and allowing the eye to rest. Space is not illusionistic but plays with the flatness of the canvas. The movement within the planar field of the paintings also goes beyond the surface to create visual depth. The fullness of the painting releases the spirit, in the painter, in the viewer.

The Complexity of Beauty

What seems apparent at first glance is rarely all it seems. Something can be read quickly but its meaning is discovered over time. Beauty has many moods with mixtures and subtleties of a complex of feelings. Beauty is powerful though usually quiet. It emerges from a sense of urgency and necessity. Resolution of chaos into order results in beauty. The radiance of these paintings and their abundant energy communicate a positive force of life that includes its difficulties as well as its joys. As with a person, the appearance of a painting has only superficially to do with its character and meaning. The goal of true beauty is the pursuit of something more ineffable, certainly deeper, truer, and always more mysterious. True beauty is not describable or definable. Like the calm that follows the storm and still carries its energy and complicated light, the beauty in and of these paintings is a result of their complications and resolutions. Beauty is something we need, which is why we are sometimes shy in front of it.





1

Mountains and Sea, 1952

Oil on unprimed canvas

220 x 297.8 cm (86 7/8 x 117 3/4 inches)

Collection of the artist,

On loan to the National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.



2

Eden, 1956

Oil on unprimed canvas

261.6 x 297.2 cm (103 x 117 inches)

Private collection



3

Europa, 1957

Oil on unprimed canvas

179.1 x 137.8 cm (70 1/2 x 54 1/4 inches)

Private collection



4

Seven Types of Ambiguity, 1957

Oil on unprimed canvas

242.6 x 178.1 cm (95 1/2 x 70 1/8 inches)

Private collection



5

New York Bamboo, 1957

Oil on unprimed canvas

177.8 x 213.4 cm (70 x 84 inches)

Private collection



6

Western Dream, 1957

Oil on unprimed canvas

177.8 x 218.4 cm (70 x 86 inches)

Private collection



7

Jacob's Ladder, 1957

Oil on unprimed canvas

287.9 x 177.5 cm (113 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 69 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York,

Gift of Hyman N. Glickstein



8

Before the Caves, 1958

Oil on unprimed canvas

260 x 265.1 cm (102 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 104 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches)

University of California, Berkeley Art Museum



9

Nude, 1958

Oil on unprimed canvas

257.8 x 115.6 cm (101 7/8 x 45 1/2 inches)

Private collection



10

Winter Hunt, 1958

Oil on unprimed canvas

231.1 x 118.1 cm (91 x 46 ½ inches)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Gift of David Geffen.



11

Acres, 1959

Oil on unprimed canvas

236.2 x 238.8 cm (93 x 94 inches)

Collection of Sandra and Jacob Y. Turner



12

Autumn Farm, 1959

Oil on unprimed canvas

111.1 x 170.2 cm (43 7/8 x 67 inches)

Private collection, Canada,

Courtesy of Sigrid Freundorfer Fine Art,

New York



13

Mother Goose Melody, 1959

Oil on unprimed canvas

208.3 x 264.2 cm (82 x 104 inches)

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,

Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis





Chronology

Excerpted, with adaptations, from the chronology and exhibition history compiled from research by Maureen St. Onge, and Heidi Colsman-Freyberger in John Elderfield, Frankenthaler (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989).

1928

December 12: Born in New York, the youngest of three daughters, to Martha (Lowenstein) and Alfred Frankenthaler, a New York State Supreme Court judge.

1940

January 7: Father dies.

1945

June: Graduates from Dalton School, New York. Previously attended Horace Mann and Brearley schools.

Fall: Continues to study with Rufino Tamayo, her art instructor at Dalton.

1946

March: Enters Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont. Studies painting with Paul Feeley.

1947

January–March: During a nonresident term at Bennington, studies at the Art Students League in New York with Vaclav Vytlacil and works as a production assistant to Maude Kemper Riley for the magazine *MKR's Art Outlook*.

1948

January: Jackson Pollock has his first solo exhibition, at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York.

January–March: During a nonresident term, teaches art at Hale House, Boston, and works for *The Cambridge Courier*.

March: *Partisan Review* publishes Clement Greenberg's "The Decline of Cubism," in which he proclaims Paris's wane as the center of vanguard art.

April: Willem de Kooning has his first solo exhibition, at Egan Gallery, New York.

July–August: Takes first trip to Europe, traveling with actress Gaby Rodgers to London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Geneva, and Paris.

Fall: Rents a cold-water apartment studio on Twenty-first Street (between Second and Third avenues) in New York; works there through winter 1951, sharing with writer Sonya Rudikoff for the first year.

1949

January–March: During a nonresident term, studies with artist Wallace Harrison at his studio on West Fourteenth Street and works for Associated American Artists gallery.

June 26–July 2: Exhibits work in *Senior Art Projects*, Carriage Barn, Bennington College.

July: Receives Bachelor of Arts degree from Bennington College.

August 8: Pollock is featured in a *Life* magazine article, which asks, "Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?"

Fall: Takes noncredit graduate classes in art history at Columbia University, New York, including a course with Meyer Schapiro.

Late fall: The Club is founded by a group of first-generation New York School abstract painters to provide an informal space for artists to meet, socialize, and exchange ideas. A loft is rented at 39 East Eighth Street. Charter members include de Kooning, Franz Kline, Phillip Pavia, Ad Reinhardt, and Milton Resnick. Frankenthaler and Robert Rauschenberg will be invited to join before the end of 1951.

1950

January: Moves into an apartment in London Terrace, 470 West Twenty-fourth Street, with Rodgers, while continuing to paint at the Twenty-first Street studio.

April 25–May 15: Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, and Alfred Leslie (artists Frankenthaler would soon be associated with) are among those chosen by Schapiro and Greenberg for inclusion in *New Talent*, Kootz Gallery, New York.

May 15–27: Organizes and participates in *Bennington College Alumnae Paintings*, Jacques Seligmann and Company Gallery, New York, exhibiting *Woman on a Horse* (1949–50) and *Woman* (1950). At the exhibition, she meets Greenberg, with whom she will spend much time during the following five years; through him she will meet Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Friedel Dzugas, Adolph Gottlieb, Kline, Lee Krasner, Barnett Newman, Pollock, Mark Rothko, David Smith, and other members of the New York School.

June 8–October 15: Work by Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Pollock, among others, is shown at the United States Pavilion at the XXV *Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia*.

July: Studies for three weeks with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

August: Visits Greenberg at Black Mountain College, near Asheville, North Carolina, for a few days.

October: Kline has his first solo show, at Egan Gallery.

November: Sees a Pollock exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, which includes *Lavender Mist* and *Autumn Rhythm* (both 1950), among other works.

December: John B. Myers opens Tibor de Nagy Gallery at 206 East Fifty-third Street, New York. Many second-generation Abstract Expressionists, including Frankenthaler, will exhibit at the gallery through the end of the decade.

December 5–30: Chosen by Gottlieb for inclusion in *Fifteen Unknowns: Selected by the Artists of the Kootz Gallery*, Kootz Gallery; *Beach* (1950) is shown.

1951

Throughout the year: Makes several trips to the home of Pollock and Krasner in The Springs on Long Island, New York, and begins to visit Smith at his studio and home in Bolton Landing, also in New York.

Winter: Meets poets John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara (with whom she will remain close until his death in 1966) through Myers.

January: Moves into own apartment at 465 West Twenty-third Street, while continuing to paint at the Twenty-first Street studio. Sees Gorky retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Clyfford Still has his last solo show in New York until 1961, at Betty Parsons Gallery. Hartigan has her first solo show, at Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Spring: Rents David Hare's studio at 79 East Tenth Street for one year.

April: Willem de Kooning has his second solo show, at Egan Gallery. Rothko has an exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery.

April–May: Newman's second solo exhibition, at Betty Parsons Gallery, is poorly reviewed; he will not exhibit in New York again until 1959.

May: "Pollock Paints a Picture," with text by Robert Goodnough and photographs by Hans Namuth documenting the artist at work in his studio, is published in *Artnews*.

May 7–June 9: Included in *The New Generation*, a group exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery; *The Picnic* (1951) and *Last June* (ca. 1950–51) are shown.

May 21–June 10: Included in *Ninth Street: Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture*, an invitational group show organized by artists at a former antique shop, 60 East Ninth Street, New York; *Untitled* (1951) is shown.

Summer: Goes to Bennington, Vermont, with Greenberg and paints landscapes.

October: Visits Sidney and Gertrude Phillips's New Jersey farm, where she paints the watercolor *Great Meadows*.

November: Sees an exhibition of black-and-white paintings by Pollock at Betty Parsons Gallery.

November 12–December 1: Has her first solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery; *Provincetown Bay* (1950), *Painted on 21st Street* (1950–51), *August Weather* (1951), *Cloudscape* (1951), *The Family* (1951), *Great Meadows* (1951), *The Intimates* (1951), *The Jugglers* (1951), *July Weather* (1951), and *The Sightseers* (1951) are shown.

1952

January: Included in first *Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, The Stable Gallery, New York. Joan Mitchell has her first solo show, at New Gallery, New York.

February: Leslie has his first solo show, at Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

March 4–22: Included in a group show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery; *Mountain King* (ca. 1951–52) is shown.

July–August: Travels to Nova Scotia with Greenberg; visits Cape Breton; draws and paints landscapes directly from nature.

Fall: Shares a studio on West Twenty-third Street (between Seventh and Eighth avenues) with Dzubas.

October 26: Paints *Mountains and Sea*.

December: *Artnews* publishes Harold Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters," which establishes the term Action Painting and lays out the existential battle being fought on the canvases of American abstract painters of the 1940s and 1950s.

1953

January 11–February 7: Included in *Second Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, The Stable Gallery.



Helen Frankenthaler visiting David Smith's studio, Bolton Landing, New York, October 1951. Smith's *The Hero* (1951–52) shown in foreground.



Clement Greenberg, Lee Krasner, and Frankenthaler outside Jackson Pollock's studio, The Springs, Long Island, summer 1952. Pollock's *Out of the Web* (1949) shown in background.



Greenberg, Frankenthaler, Smith, Jennifer Feeley, Jean Smith, and Jill Feeley at Bolton Landing, New York, February 1954.

January 27–February 14: Second solo exhibition, at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, includes *Bright Thicket* (1951), *Ed Winston's Tropical Gardens* (1951), *Chrysanthemums* (1952), *Garden Maze* (1952), *Mountains and Sea*, *New Jersey Landscape* (1952), *Panorama* (1952), *Scene with Nude* (1952), *Self-Portrait* (1952), *Skyscape* (1952), *Tree* (1952), *Window Shade No. 1* (1952), and *Window Shade No. 2* (1952).

March 20–April 2: Included in *Nine Women Painters*, Bennington College Gallery, Bennington, Vermont; *Window Shade No. 1* is shown.

April 3: Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland visit Frankenthaler's studio, where they see, among other works, *Mountains and Sea*, the painting they will later credit with influencing their mature styles.

July–August: Travels extensively throughout Spain, seeing the cave paintings at Altamira and making repeated visits to the Museo del Prado; from Majorca, travels to Barcelona and the South of France, where she views the work of Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

1954

January: Greenberg includes Louis and Noland in *Emerging Talent*, Kootz Gallery.

January 27–February 20: Included in *Third Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, The Stable Gallery; *Granada* (1953) is shown.

April 23: Mother dies.

Summer: Travels with Greenberg to Madrid, Rome, throughout the Italian hill towns to Florence—where she visits Bernard Berenson at Villa i Tatti—and also to Milan, Bologna, Ravenna, Venice, and London, studying the Old Masters.

Fall: Moves studio and living quarters to 697 West End Avenue (at Ninety-fourth Street).

November 16–December 4: Solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy

Gallery; *The Drive* (1953), *Open Wall* (1953), *River* (1953), *Shatter* (1953), *With Blue* (1953), *The Desert* (1954), *The Facade* (1954), *Palisade* (1954), *Passport* (1954), *Plateau* (1954), and *Yellow Center* (1954) are shown.

1955

Spring: *Partisan Review* publishes Greenberg's "American Type Painting," a formalist discussion of the talents of the major painters associated with Abstract Expressionism that proclaims the ascendance of American art.

April 26–May 21: Exhibits *Mountains and Sea* in *Fourth Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, The Stable Gallery.

Summer: Rents artist Conrad Marca-Relli's house and studio in The Springs.

October 13–December 18: Included in *The 1955 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting*, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; *The Facade* is shown.

October 23–December 5: *Satellites*, *Early Summer*, and *Mountain Storm* (all 1955) are shown in *Vanguard 1955: A Painter's Selection of New American Paintings*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the exhibition travels to the Stable Gallery, December 28, 1955–January 5, 1956.

November 29–December 23: Selected by critic and *Artnews* editor Thomas Hess for inclusion in *U.S. Painting: Some Recent Directions*, The Stable Gallery; *Mountains and Sea* and *Morning Star* (1955) are shown.

1956

January 31–February 25: Solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery includes, among other works, *Blue Territory*, *Holocaust*, *Mountain Storm*, and *Trojan Gates* (all 1955).

May 22–June 16: Participates in *Fifth Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, The Stable Gallery.

August: Travels to France, Germany, Austria, and the



Frankenthaler with Greenberg, Piazza San Marco, Venice, summer 1954.



Frankenthaler in her West End Avenue studio, New York, 1956.

Netherlands; paints the watercolor *Hôtel du Quai Voltaire* in Paris.

August 10: Pollock dies in an automobile accident.

Fall: Paints *Eden* and other soak-stained paintings.

October 15–27: Included in *Art for Two Synagogues*, Kootz Gallery.

1957

January: Noland has his first solo exhibition in New York, at Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

February 12–March 2: Has a solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery; *Eden* is shown for the first time, along with *Cosmopolitan* (1956), *Lorelei* (1956), *Mount Sinai* (1956), *Neighborhood Walks* (1956), *Planetarium* (1956), *Solstice* (1956), *Two Worlds* (1956), *Venus and the Mirror* (1956), *Blue Atmosphere* (1956–57), and *Giralda* (1956).

February 27–April 14: Included in *Young America 1957: Thirty American Painters and Sculptors under Thirty-Five*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. *Blue Territory*, *Hofburg Palace* (1956), and *Neighborhood Walks* are shown.

March 8–27: Included in *Panel's Choice 1957*, The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. The exhibition travels to the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh. *Beach Scene* is shown.

March 10–April 28: Schapiro selects *Early Summer* and *Breakthrough* (1956) for inclusion in *Artists of the New York School: Second Generation*, The Jewish Museum, New York.

March 11: Featured as one of six exceptional young artists in "The Younger Generation," an article published in *Time*.

March 13–April 21: Included in *Recent American Acquisitions*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; *Trojan Gates* is shown.

April 1–21: Included in *New Talent in the U.S.*, a traveling exhibition organized by the American Federation of the Arts.

May 13: “Women Artists in Ascendance: Young Group Reflects Lively Virtues of U.S. Painting,” an article published in *Life*, represents Frankenthaler as one of five outstanding women painters under the age of thirty-five in the United States.

June 18–September 1: Included in *American Paintings 1945–1957*, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts; *Eden* and *Lorelei* are shown.

Summer: Visits Bolton Landing, East Hampton, and Martha’s Vineyard and Provincetown, Massachusetts; draws and paints on these trips.

November: Louis has his first solo exhibition in New York, at Martha Jackson Gallery.

1958

January 6–25: Exhibits for the last time at Tibor de Nagy Gallery; the show includes *Round Trip*, *Towards a New Climate*, and *New York Bamboo* (all 1957).

January 14–March 16: Included in *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The exhibition travels to The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., and other locations in the United States. *Lorelei* is shown.

April 6: Marries Robert Motherwell and moves to East Ninety-fourth Street.

April 12–20: Included in *The International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai*, Osaka International Festival, Japan; *Eden* is shown.

May–October: Rents a house in Saint-Jean-de-Luz with Motherwell and from there makes extended trips through France and Spain, including visits to Lascaux and Altamira; paints throughout this time.



Clockwise from left: John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Frankenthaler, and an unidentified person at the Five Spot, New York, 1957.



Frankenthaler with Robert Motherwell in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, France, summer 1958.

Fall: Moves studio to an apartment on Third Avenue (between Ninety-fourth and Ninety-fifth streets). Participates in "Round Table on Contemporary Art," part of the Great Neck Adult Program, Great Neck, Long Island, teaching painting along with Hubert Crehan, Hartigan, and Fairfield Porter.

November 19, 1958–January 4, 1959: Included in *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Hotel Cro-Magnon* (1958), a work on primed canvas, is shown.

December 5, 1958–February 8, 1959: *Jacob's Ladder* (1957) is shown in *The 1958 Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

1959

March 1–April 5: Included in *Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture 1959*, University of Illinois, Urbana; *L'Amour Toujours L'Amour* (1958) is shown.

March 30–April 25: First exhibition at André Emmerich Gallery, New York, includes *The Beach Horse* (1959), *Before the Caves* (1958), *Hotel Cro-Magnon*, *Las Mayas* (1958), *Nude* (1958), *Winter Hunt* (1958), *Autumn Farm* (1959), *French Horizon* (1959), and *Madridscape* (1959).

June–September: Rents a house with Motherwell in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Paints *Mother Goose Melody* there.

July 11–October 11: Included in *Documenta II*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, West Germany; *Mountains and Sea*, *Las Mayas*, and *Nude* are shown.

September 21–December 31: Chosen by Sam Hunter for inclusion in *V Bienal de São Paulo*, Museo de Arte Moderna, São Paulo. The exhibition travels to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. *Venus and the Mirror*, *Basque Beach* (1958), and *Winter Hunt* are shown.

Fall: Teaches painting and drawing part-time at the School of

Education, New York University; will continue to do so intermittently through 1961.

October 2–25: Represents the United States in *Première Biennale de Paris*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; *Jacob's Ladder* wins first prize; *Before the Caves* and *French Horizon* are also exhibited.

1960

January: Moves studio to Eighty-third Street at Third Avenue.

January 26–March 2: First retrospective exhibition, *Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings*, is held at the Jewish Museum, New York.

February: Travels to Haiti.

March 28–April 23: Has second show at André Emmerich Gallery; *Five*, *Labor Day*, *Mother Goose Melody*, *Red Square*, and *Sea Picture with Black* (all 1959), among other works, are shown.

April 3–May 8: Included in *Sixty American Painters 1960: Abstract Expressionist Painting of the Fifties*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; *Las Mayas* is shown.

May 2: Featured, with Hartigan and Mitchell, in the *Time* magazine article “Vocal Girls” as one of the most successful second-generation Abstract Expressionist artists.



Installation view of Frankenthaler's first retrospective exhibition, *Helen Frankenthaler: Paintings*, at the Jewish Museum, New York, 1960. Works shown are *Trojan Gates* (1955), *Jacob's Ladder* (1957), *Shatter* (1953), and *Las Mayas* (1958).

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